

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

Social Security Scotland Statistics

Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods: high level statistics to 31 August 2020

Frequency of publications

The next publication, covering up to end November 2020, will be released in January 2021.

Under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹ we publish a timetable of statistical releases for the twelve months ahead².

¹ The Code of Practice is found online at: <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

² The forthcoming publication timetable is available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/official-statistics-forthcoming-publications/>

Introduction

The Best Start Grant consists of three different benefit payments: Pregnancy and Baby Payment (applications taken from 10 December 2018), Early Learning Payment (applications taken from 29 April 2019) and School Age Payment (applications taken from 3 June 2019). The [Background](#) section has further detail about these different payments.

This publication provides information on applications and payments for Best Start Grant from 10 December 2018 to 31 August 2020. It therefore includes figures for approximately twenty months of Pregnancy and Baby Payment applications, sixteen months of Early Learning Payment applications, and fifteen months of School Age Payment applications.

Best Start Foods is a recurring four weekly pre-paid card payment, which replaced Healthy Start Vouchers for new claims in Scotland from 12 August 2019. This publication provides information on applications and payments for Best Start Foods from 12 August 2019 to 31 August 2020.

As this publication reports on applications and decisions to the end of August 2020, it spans the time period when the Covid-19 pandemic was present in Scotland, as the first case was confirmed on 1 March 2020. Social Security Scotland implemented some service changes in March in response to the Covid-19 pandemic but continued to process applications and make payments.

All tables and charts relating to this publication can be found at:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/>.

These statistics are being published as experimental statistics. Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Statistics as "*new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.*" These statistics have not yet been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. They have not been designated as National Statistics³.

³ For more information on experimental statistics please see:

<https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/types-of-official-statistics/>

Main findings

Key figures

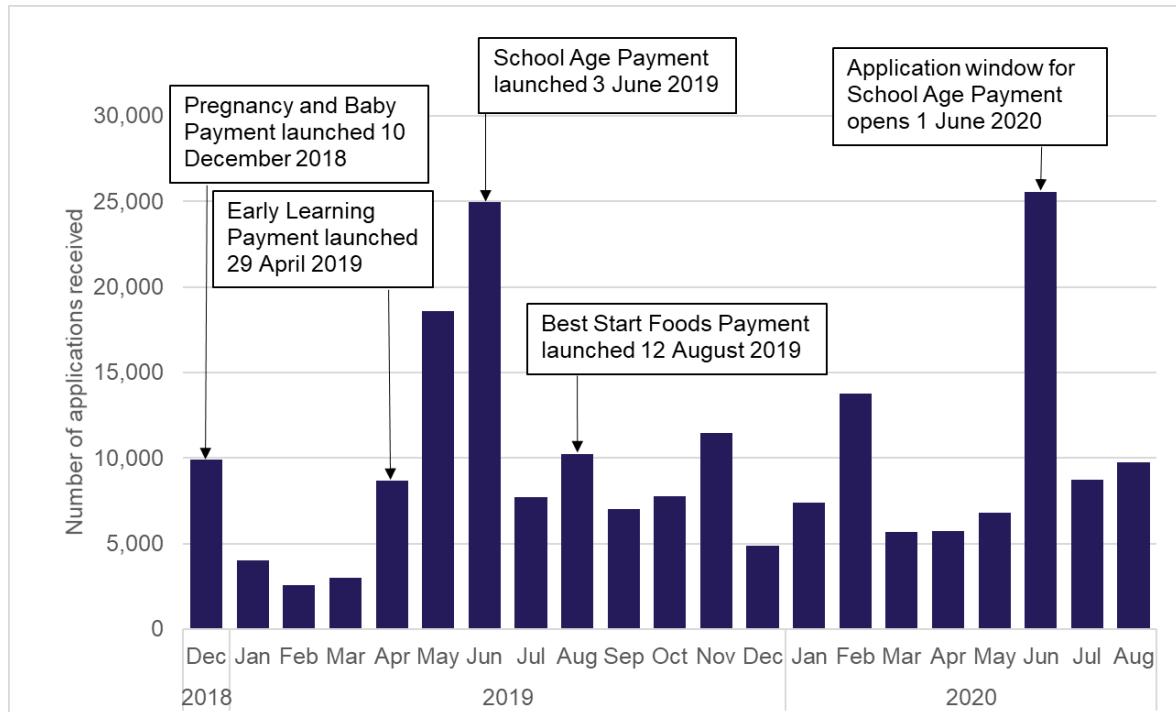
- From 10 December 2018 to 31 August 2020, 204,130 applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods were received [Table 1]. Out of these applications, we estimate that 69,525 were for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, 66,365 were for Early Learning Payment, 48,380 were for School Age Payment and 84,915 for Best Start Foods payment. Applications for multiple payments are counted multiple times within these figures [Table 2a].
- In total, 190,080 applications had been processed by 31 August 2020. Of these, 68% were authorised for at least one Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods payment type [Table 1].
- In total, £38.1 million had been paid to clients by 31 August 2020 for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. Of this, £13.2 million of payments was for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, £9.7 million was for Early Learning Payment and £8.3 million was for School Age Payment. Overall, £6.9 million was paid for Best Start Foods by the end of August 2020 [Table 11].

Applications by month

- Overall, 25,555 applications were received in June 2020. This is the largest monthly figure for applications received to date. This increase is likely due to the application window for School Age Payment which opened on the 1st of June. A similar spike in monthly application volume was noted when the application window for School Age Payments opened in June 2019. In July 2020, a total of 8,745 applications were received and in August 9,770 applications were received. [Table 1, Chart 1].
- Starting in early August, letters were issued to families who may be eligible for Best Start Foods and Best Start Grant inviting them to apply.
- Overall, 10,930 applications were processed in June 2020 and a further 16,625 in July 2020. In August 2020, 11,385 applications were processed. These monthly figures are higher than all preceding months since July 2019. The proportion of applications authorised remained relatively constant from June 2020 (79%) to July (81%) and declined in August 2020 (75%) [Table 1].
- The excerpt from Table 1 below summarises Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications and outcomes by financial year. So far, the current financial year (2020/21) accounts for 28% of all applications received since December 2018 and reflects a 75%

approval rate for application decisions. The previous financial year accounts for 63% of all applications received and shows a slightly lower approval rate of 66% for application decisions [Table 1, Excerpt from Table 1].

Chart 1: Applications received by month



Excerpt from Table 1: Applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods by financial year

Period	Applications Received		Applications Processed			
	Total	% of total applications received	Total	% authorised	% denied	% withdrawn
Total	204,130	100%	190,080	68%	28%	3%
Financial Year 2018 - 2019 ⁴	19,480	10%	17,935	64%	34%	2%
Financial Year 2019 - 2020 ⁵	128,040	63%	120,730	66%	29%	4%
Financial Year 2020 - 2021 ⁶	56,610	28%	51,415	75%	24%	1%

⁴ During the 2018/19 financial year, only the Pregnancy and Baby Payment was available to clients. This was launched in December 2018 and this financial period therefore only contains data for the four months from December 2018 to March 2019.

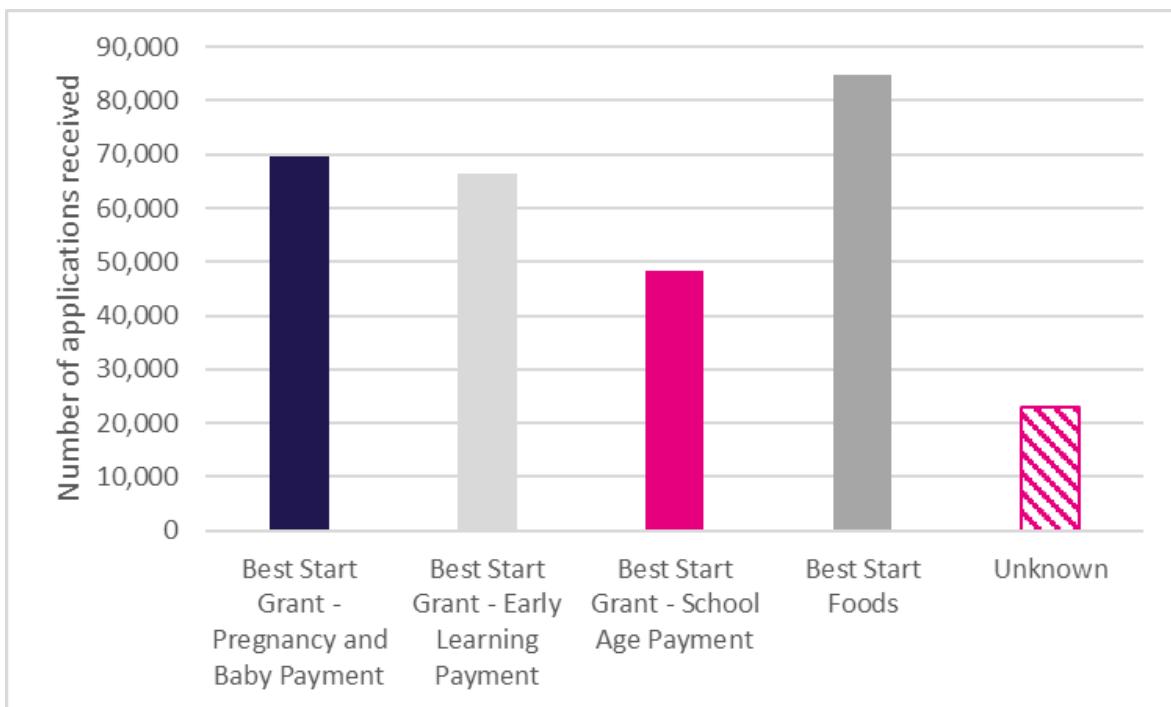
⁵ The 2019/2020 financial year includes the months from April 2019 to March 2020.

⁶ The 2020/21 financial year only contains data for the months of April to August 2020 at the time of publication.

Applications by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment type

- Of the 204,130 applications received between 10 December 2018 and 31 August 2020, 69,525 were estimated to be for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, 66,365 for Early Learning Payment, 48,380 for School Age Payment and 84,915 for Best Start Foods. An additional 22,820 applications were classified as Unknown due to them not containing details of eligible children **[Table 2a, Chart 2]**. This breakdown is based on the details of children included in applications. The [About the data](#) section explains how the payment being applied for is derived.
- In total, 190,080 applications had been processed by 31 August 2020. Of these, 68% were authorised for Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods, with some applicants being authorised for multiple payments. In total, 28% of applications were denied for both Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment, and 3% were withdrawn by 31 August 2020 **[Table 1]**.
- Of the applications assumed to be for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, based on presence of baby details in the application form, 52% were authorised by the end of August 2020. The proportion of applications assumed to be for Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment, based on the age of children included in applications, that were authorised was 63% and 74% respectively **[Table 2a]**. Pregnancy and Baby Payment approval rates are however not comparable with Early Learning and School Age payments due to different methodology used to derive the numbers. Please see [Data Quality](#) section for further details on approval and denial rates.
- Of the applications that were processed for Best Start Foods, 64% were authorised **[Table 2a]**.
- In the current financial year, the proportion of applications assumed to be for School Age Payment that were authorised was 82%. This authorisation rate will likely have been the result of a high number of eligible applications being received following the opening of the application window in June **[Table 2d]**.

Chart 2: Applications received by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods benefit type to 31 August 2020. Applications for multiple types of payment are counted multiple times within this chart.



Application channel (method of application)

- Around 93% of applications received by 31 August 2020 were made online, while 7% were telephone or paper applications. Very few applications were received via an unknown channel, amounting to less than 1% [Table 3]. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of applications by phone and paper for December 2018 to April 2019. The [About the data](#) section has further information about the application channel data.
- In June 2020, 97% of applications were received online. This reduced to 94%, and 93%, in July and August, respectively. The remaining applications were by telephone and by paper application [Table 3].
- The number of applications made by telephone increased from previous months. This is likely due to changes made to the telephony service. Changes were made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that meant the full telephony service was not available from 24 March onwards. On 3 July, a limited inbound telephony service was re-introduced. [Table 3].

Age group

- Around 97% of applications were made by people aged 18 to 44 by end of August 2020. Only around 1% of applications were made by people under 18, and similarly, around 2% by people aged 45 or over [Table 4].

Applications by local authority, health board and non-Scottish postcodes

- To date, the local authorities with the highest number of applications were 33,745 from Glasgow City, 15,755 from North Lanarkshire and 14,825 from Fife. The lowest number of applications were 405 from Shetland Islands, 415 from Orkney Islands and 580 from Na h-Eileanan Siar [Table 5].
- Similarly, the health board with the highest number of applications was Greater Glasgow and Clyde, with 52,515 applications. The lowest numbers of applications were from Shetland, Orkney and Western Isles respectively [Table 7].
- While the percentage of processed applications authorised overall was 68%, this varied between local authorities, ranging from the lowest at 68% in Orkney Islands to the highest at 75% in Scottish Borders [Table 5].
- In total, 9,770 applications were made by people living at non-Scottish postcodes [Table 5].
- Further information on the breakdown of applications within a local authority or health board can be found in the supplementary tables [Tables 6, 8].
- More information on deriving the local authorities and health boards for applications can be found in the [Geography](#) section.

Pregnancy and Baby Payment applications for first and subsequent births

- More Pregnancy and Baby Payment applications were received for subsequent births than first births. By 31 August 2020, 55% of Pregnancy and Baby applications were for subsequent births (i.e. to clients that already had children under 16 that lived with them and that they were responsible for), while 45% of applications were for first births [Table 9].
- The proportion of applications authorised was higher for subsequent births, at 64%, than first births, at 38%. This may be because clients applying for their first child are less likely to be on a qualifying benefit, particularly if the application for Best Start Grant

was received before the birth of their baby. In total 22,870 applications were authorised for subsequent births and 10,795 for first births **[Table 9]**.

- Overall, 2% of Pregnancy and Baby Payment applications received by the end of August 2020 were for multiple births, which had an authorisation rate of 63% **[Table 9]**.

Processing times

- Since the introduction of Best Start Foods payment in August 2019, each application requires two decisions (Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods) to be made at the same time.
- In total, around 48% of the applications that were received since December 2018 and decided by 31 August 2020 were processed within 10 working days. Around 22% of all applications took 21 days or more to be processed **[Table 10]**. This processing time includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents from clients, but does not include additional time to make payments.
- Over the last three months, the proportions of applications processed within 10 working days were 32% in June, 11% in July, 37% in August 2020. This shows a decline from the 44% recorded in May 2020.
- By the end of August 2020, the median average processing time since December 2018 had increased to 11 days.
- The median processing time for processed applications in June 2020 was 14 working days. This increased substantially to 20 working days in July and again to 28 working days in August, which is the highest monthly figure to date. These recent monthly figures are all higher than the overall median processing time of 11 working days.
- The change in processing times in recent months may partly be the result of the reduced telephony impacting on the ability to gather evidence to progress applications. Additionally, the increased volume of applications, following the opening of the School Age Payment application window in June, required assessment for both Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods components.
- On 30 March 2020, Social Security Scotland launched an online document upload function which provides an alternative method for applicants to provide evidence. More information about application processing can be found in [Data Quality](#) section.

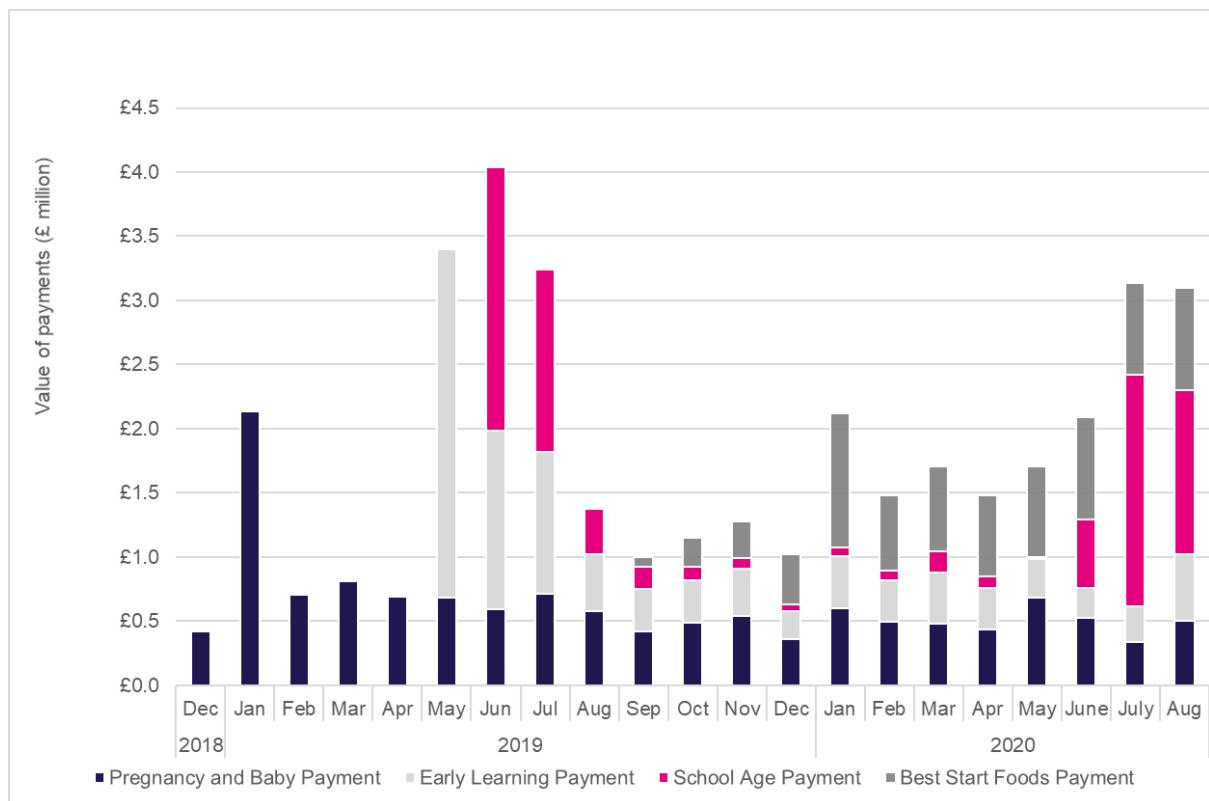
Payments

- The total value of Best Start Grant and Best Start Food payments to 31 August 2020 was £38.1 million. Of this, £13.2 million was for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, £9.7 million was for Early Learning Payment and £8.3 million was for School Age Payment. Of total

payments, £6.9 million was for Best Start Foods by the end of August 2020 [Table 11, Table 12, Chart 3]. Some clients will have received multiple types of payment.

- The below excerpt from Table 12 summarises Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payments by benefit type and financial year. The current financial year shows a higher proportion of payments made for Best Start Foods at 32% than the previous financial year at 14%. This is largely due to there being no Best Start Foods payments prior to August 2019 and also because the Best Start Foods payments are recurring, with five payment cycles already occurring within the current financial year.
- In the current financial year, the proportion of School Age Payments paid to August 2020 is 32%, compared to 20% in the previous financial year. This increase is likely due to the eligibility window for School Age Payments being open from June 2020. Both Pregnancy and Baby Payment and Early Learning Payment represent a lower proportion of total payments than the previous financial year. [Table 12, Chart 3, Excerpt from Table 12].
- At local authority level, the highest total value of payments were made to people in Glasgow City at £6.5 million, North Lanarkshire at £3.1 million and Fife at £3.0 million. The lowest total value of payments was made to people in Shetland Islands at £72,745, Orkney Islands at £75,100 and Na h-Eileanan Siar at £105,599 [Table 11].

Chart 3: Payments issued by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods benefit type to 31 August 2020.



Excerpt from Table 12: Payments by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment type and financial year

Period	Payment value		% payment type			
	Total		% Best Start Grant			% Best Start Foods
			% Pregnancy and Baby Payment	% Early Learning Payment	% School Age Payment	
Total	£ 38.1 million		35%	25%	22%	18%
Financial Year 2018 - 2019 ⁷	£ 4.1 million		100%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Financial Year 2019 - 2020 ⁸	£ 22.5 million		30%	36%	20%	14%
Financial Year 2020 - 2021 ⁹	£ 11.5 million		22%	14%	32%	32%

⁷ During the 2018/19 financial year, only the Pregancy and Baby Payment was available to clients. This was launched in December 2018 and this financial period therefore only contains data for the four months from December 2018 to March 2019.

⁸ The 2019/2020 financial year includes the months from April 2019 to August 2020.

⁹ The 2020/21 financial year only contains data for the months of April to August 2020 at the time of publication.

Redeterminations and appeals

- Management information collected manually by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland indicates that 2,020 redeterminations were requested by 31 August 2020. This represents around 1.1% of the total number of decisions made during this period **[Table 13]**.
- By 31 August 2020, 1,970 redetermination requests had been decided. Of these, 49% redetermination requests were disallowed, 25% allowed or partially allowed and 26% withdrawn. A disallowed redetermination request is one that is accepted as valid, however payment has been rejected as the criteria for a payment has not been met. Around 3% of redetermination requests received were pending an outcome by the end of August 2020 **[Table 13]**.
- The median measure of number of days to respond to a redetermination request was 12 working days. Up to 31 August 2020, around 97% of completed redeterminations were closed within 16 working days. Where redeterminations were closed after the deadline of 16 working days, extensions were agreed with the client and the redeterminations were closed within the mutually agreed deadline **[Table 13]**.
- Management information also indicates that 80 appeals were received by 31 August 2020 **[Table 13]**. The tribunal have considered 65 appeals and in 60 of these cases have agreed that the original Social Security Scotland decision be upheld.

Best Start Foods Reviews

- By 31 August 2020, 295 requests had been received to review a Best Start Foods decision. This represents 0.3% of the total number of Best Start Foods decisions made **[Table 14]**.
- Of these requests, 280 were completed by 31 August 2020 **[Table 14]**. Of the completed reviews, 44% were allowed, with 45% being disallowed and 11% withdrawn.
- The median measure of number of days to respond to a Best Start Foods review request was 13 working days **[Table 14]**.

Background to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods

The Scotland Act 2016¹⁰ gives Scottish Parliament powers over a number of social security benefits which had been administered to Scottish claimants by the Department for Work and Pensions.

On 10 December 2018, Scottish Ministers initiated their competence to deliver the Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, a form of Early Years Assistance, under the Social Security Scotland Act 2018. Social Security Scotland – the executive agency of Scottish Government responsible for delivering social security benefits for Scotland – began taking applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment on Monday 10 December 2018. This replaced the Sure Start Maternity Grant which the Department for Work and Pensions ceased to deliver on the same day.

On 29 April 2019, Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment.

On 3 June 2019, Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Best Start Grant School Age Payment.

On 12 August 2019, Social Security Scotland began taking applications for the Best Start Foods payment card. Best Start Foods replaces the UK Government Healthy Start Vouchers Scheme. Clients in receipt of Healthy Start Vouchers were sent an invitation to apply for Best Start Foods before 31st March 2020.

Further details about all Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payments can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant/>.

Pregnancy and Baby Payment

The Pregnancy and Baby Payment is a cash payment for parents and carers when they are expecting or have a new child. It is paid to help cover some of the costs of having children. These costs could be things like needing a pram or buying clothes. The Pregnancy and Baby Payment provides eligible families with £600 for a first child and £300 for any subsequent children. There is an additional multi-birth supplement of £300 to help with the costs of having more than one baby, such as twins or triplets. There is no limit on the number of children that are supported.

For example, if someone has twins and one is their first child, they would receive £1,200. This is made up of £600 for the first child, £300 for the second child and £300 for having twins. An applicant having twins where none of the children are

¹⁰ The Scotland Act 2016 webpage at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/scotland.html>

their first child would get £900. This is made up of £300 for each child plus a £300 payment for twins.

The application window is from 24 weeks pregnant to 6 months after the birth (or up to the day before the child is 1 year old for people who take over looking after a baby, such as adoptive parents or kinship carers). If a baby was stillborn or died after they were born, applications can still be made up to six months after their birth date. Applicants must not already be in receipt of the Sure Start Maternity Grant for the baby being applied for.

Early Learning Payment

The Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment is a £250 payment to help support child development, for example travel costs, changes of clothes for messy play, trips out and toys for home learning. The application window is from a child's second birthday up to the day the child is 3 years 6 months old.

The application window captures the two common ages for starting nursery, depending on whether parents qualify for a nursery place when the child is two or three. There is no requirement to take up a place at nursery to qualify for a payment.

School Age Payment

The Best Start Grant School Age Payment is a £250 payment to help with the costs of preparing for school, for example educational toys or after school activities. Eligibility is based on the child's age and relates to when a child is first old enough to start school. Exact dates when applications should be made depend on when the child was born. These dates are shown in the table below. Children born before 1 March 2014 are not eligible to receive the grant.

Child's date of birth	When application can be made
Between 1 March 2014 and 28 February 2015.	Between 3 June 2019 and 29 February 2020. This application window has now closed.
Between 1 March 2015 and 29 February 2016.	Between 1 June 2020 and 28 February 2021.
Between 1 March 2016 and 28 Feb 2017.	Between 1 June 2021 and 28 February 2022.

Best Start Foods

Best Start Foods is available to pregnant women and families on certain low income benefits. It introduces a payment card that can be used to support the purchase of certain foods, liquid cow's milk and First Infant formula for pregnant

women and children under three. Eligible women and families can apply from the start of pregnancy and at any time up to their child's 3rd birthday provided that they are resident in Scotland and are in receipt of certain qualifying benefits.

There was transitional protection up until 31st March 2020 for existing recipients of Healthy Start Vouchers where a child was over 2 years old at the time of application. This transitional protection gave the child Best Start Foods payments up until their 4th birthday as long as the client was in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Healthy Start Vouchers, which are administered by the Department for Health and Social care, are no longer available to Scottish recipients from March 31st 2020 when the UK Scheme was revoked in Scotland.

The payments of Best Start Foods are:

- £17 every 4 weeks during pregnancy
- £34 every 4 weeks from a child being born up until their 1st birthday
- £17 every 4 weeks for children between the ages of 1 and 3
- £17 every 4 weeks for transitionally protected children between the ages of 2 and 4

Eligibility

To be eligible to qualify for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applicants must live in Scotland. Best Start Grant applicants over 18 must be getting at least one of: Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit, Income Support, Pension Credit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance or Income-related Employment and Support Allowance. Applicants under 18 do not need to be getting any qualifying benefits. This also applies to 18 and 19 year old applicants who are dependent on someone else.

The benefits you need to be on to get Best Start Foods are the same as Best Start Grant, but some of the benefits have an income limit. These include:

- Universal Credit – if applicant or applicant's partner have a job, their joint income from working must be less than £610 a month, after tax and National Insurance – Universal Credit payments are not counted as part of this
- Child Tax Credit – applicant and applicant partner's joint income must be less than £16,190
- Working Tax Credit – only counts if applicant also gets full Child Tax Credit and applicant's income is less than £7,320 per year
- Housing Benefit – the weekly income of applicant and applicant's partner must be no more than £311.

Applications can be made by the main person who is responsible for the child, or their partner. This includes: the child's birth mother; her partner; her parent or carer if she is dependent on them (Pregnancy and Baby Payment only); single fathers; or people who have started looking after, and are responsible for, the child e.g. kinship carers. Further details about the benefits and legal orders that identify the main people responsible for looking after a child are given at <https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/>. Claims cannot be made by foster or residential carers, because in these cases the local authority will already be paying for the items that the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are intended to help provide.

For Best Start Grant, there is usually one payment for each child for each life event i.e. one payment for each child for each of the three different Best Start Grant payments. There is an exception if responsibility for the child changes within the application window i.e. the child moves to live with a different carer (kinship carer/adoptive parent) who now meets the responsibility test. In this case there can be one further payment.

Application and decision making process

Applications can be made online, by phone, and by paper form ('application channel').

There is a single application form for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods that covers the Pregnancy and Baby, Early Learning and School Age Payments and Best Start Foods. Rather than indicating what they wish to apply for on the form, applicants provide details about themselves, their partner, all dependent children, and any details about their pregnancy and expected children. When the application is processed, Social Security Scotland determines which elements of Best Start Grant the client is eligible to receive, and makes a single payment to the client to cover all of these elements. Social Security Scotland will also determine whether the client is eligible for Best Start Foods, which is a recurring payment being issued every 4 weeks.

Social Security Scotland processes each application received and makes a decision whether to approve or deny the application. Decisions for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are normally made at the same time. An application will be denied if the client is not eligible to receive any of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payments. An application will be authorised if the client is eligible to receive at least one of the Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods payments. Applicants may also withdraw their application before a decision is made.

Social Security Scotland aims to process the application and make a decision, and provide decision letters to the applicant, within 21 days of receiving an application. Separate letters for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are provided. Applications may take longer to process if copies of documents need to be requested and received from clients. For example, copies of maternity or birth

certificates might be required. Once an application is decided, Social Security Scotland then aims to provide Best Start Grant payments within seven days, and Best Start Foods cards within six weeks, of applicants receiving their decision letters.

In this publication, application processing time is calculated as the number of working days from the application being received by Social Security Scotland to the date that a decision was made or the application was withdrawn. We do not include time to make payments within processing time.

Redeterminations and appeals

Best Start Grant applicants can ask Social Security Scotland to look again at what they have decided if their application is denied, or if they think the amount they are going to be paid is wrong. This is known as a redetermination. A request for a redetermination should be made within 31 calendar days of being notified of the determination. This is extended to up to 1 year under extenuating circumstances. Social Security Scotland then has 16 working days to make the new determination. Best Start Grant applicants also have the right to appeal to a Tribunal if they do not agree with Social Security Scotland's redetermination, or if Social Security Scotland is not able to make a redetermination within 16 working days.

Best Start Foods has no statutory right of appeal which means it does not have a redetermination or appeal process. It does however have an internal review process which means that applicant can have their decisions looked at again.

Social Security Scotland has a working agreement that allows to offer an extension of 5 days to clients should they be waiting on documentation/evidence being sent in. This is to allow Social Security Scotland to process a client application rather than make a decision without any evidence.

Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020

On 1 April 2020, the Scottish Parliament approved emergency legislation to help businesses, public services and people through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Measures include helping to ensure that Social Security Scotland clients are not disadvantaged as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and are able to claim assistance to which they are entitled and which they may have missed out on if late applications were not allowed.

Changes, which came into force on 7 April 2020, include temporarily relaxing time limits for Best Start Grant. Where original time limits have not been met directly as a result of Covid-19, the measures temporarily relax time limits for Best Start Grant in relation to:

- Making an application for assistance

- A request by a client for a redetermination
- A decision on a redetermination
- Appealing to the First tier Tribunal

Additionally, the Coronavirus (Scotland) 2020 Act provides Social Security Scotland extra time to complete a re-determination. Social Security Scotland will continue to make all re-determinations as quickly as is possible under the circumstances, as the Act requires Social Security Scotland to make the re-determination as soon as reasonably practicable within a new extended timescale of an additional 9 weeks on top of the current 16 working days.

About the data

How the data is collected

The data in this publication is sourced from Social Security Scotland's case management system. The system holds information on all applications received, decisions and payments. Data about the applicant, their partner, and their children is collected through the online application form or is entered by client advisors during telephone applications or processing of paper applications. Information about the application outcome and payments is created in the case management system as an application is processed.

The information is held across multiple tables within the system. 100% extracts of administrative data are taken from this system every day for internal reporting purposes. Data cuts combine information from the different tables in the system into one daily extract which includes details of all applications made since 10 December 2018. An additional child extract containing details about children listed in the application forms is also available for reporting purposes. A payments extract is used for calculations in this publication too. It contains information on financial aspects of applications.

To take into account backdating and delays between applications being authorised and payments being made, the data cut from 30 September 2020 has been used to produce statistics on applications received and decisions made up to 11.59 pm on 31 August 2020. Later data cuts may include additional retrospective changes to application details, including corrections to details in the case management system, and changes that have resulted from redeterminations and appeals.

When a redetermination or appeal is requested, the data in this publication will show the decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value after a redetermination or appeal has been decided. Where a redetermination or appeal has been requested but not decided, decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value will be updated to reflect information about the redetermination or appeal, rather than the original application.

More detailed redeterminations, appeals, and Best Start Food reviews management information is collected manually by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland. It is currently not possible to link this management information to data extracted from the case management system. However, in future updates to these statistics, information on redeterminations and appeals will be available for each application directly from the case management system.

When a Best Start Foods application is asked to be reviewed, the review data in this publication does not include applications that had a Best Start Grant redetermination associated with them. This results in slightly lower numbers reported for Best Start Foods reviews process.

Revisions

Each updated publication of Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods statistics can include revisions of numbers of applications received, processed, processing times and payment values going back to December 2018. This is because each time figures are published they will be based from a new 100% data cut from the case management system, which can include retrospective changes to data going back to December 2018 as described in the [How the data is collected](#) section. More recent months tend to be subject to a greater degree of revision than more distant ones.

An updated version of the postcode lookup file has been used in the analysis for this publication, making it possible to link certain applicant postcodes to local authorities and health boards where it was previously not (for example, in the case of some newly built houses). There are therefore fewer applications with Scottish postcodes that can not be matched to a local authority or health board.

Quality assurance

The data used to produce the official statistics are the same as the data extracted from the case management system on a daily basis that is used for internal reporting within Social Security Scotland. As such, the data is checked daily for consistency with previous extracts (i.e. do applications, decisions and payments figures increase as expected over time, and are they in proportion to each other) and compared to other sources of information such as the number of payment instructions reported by the finance team.

Additional quality assurance and cleaning has been carried out on the variables used in the official statistics:

- Check for duplicate and missing application references
- Checking application dates, processing times and payment times are within the expected ranges
- Checking applicant and child dates of birth are within the expected ranges – see [Age and Gender](#) section

- Checking postcodes that do not match to local authorities – see [Geography](#) section
- Checking payment values match to expected number of children – see [First and Subsequent birth](#) section

Once the data is aggregated and copied into the publication and supporting Excel tables, the final statistics are quality assured by a different member of the statistics team. The final documents are checked by the lead statistician.

Data Quality

Rounding and disclosure control

Application and outcome figures have been rounded to the nearest five for disclosure control. Data has been suppressed where it would disclose fewer than five applications or payments.

Missing and duplicate applications

The data comes from 100% data cut of the case management system.

The data cut contained a small proportion of applications where the fields relating to application date and the outcome and payment of the application were blank. These applications represent temporary ‘prospect cases’, which are created when clients contact Social Security Scotland without a National Insurance number, and are later replaced once a National Insurance number is received from the applicant. These applications are therefore duplicates and have been excluded from the statistics.

Clients can make multiple applications for different payments of Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods over time, or may make repeated applications for the same payment, for example if their first application is denied. This means that there can be several applications in the data cut from the same client. For this publication we have retained all these applications.

Unverified information from application form

Information about the client and their children is taken from the application form completed by the client or by a client advisor over the telephone. This information may contain errors because it has not been verified by comparison to other sources of information such as records held by the Department for Work and Pensions. This means for example that it is possible to have authorised applications where the original application form did not include details of any eligible children, because the date of birth of any children was originally incorrect but was later amended as the application was processed.

Delay between application authorised and payment

In this publication, the date that applications were processed by client advisors is the date used to produce statistics of processed applications by month. After applications are authorised for payment by client advisors, the decision is approved by a manager, and then a payment is issued. In some cases, payments will be issued on the same day that payments are authorised by client advisors, however in other cases there can be a delay before payments are issued. Clients should receive money in their nominated account within four working days after payment is issued.

Applications by payment type

There is one application form covering all types of Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment. Clients do not need to select which type of payment they wish to apply for. Therefore statistics on number of applications by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment type have been derived from the type of information and ages of children included in applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. In the current publication, applications are classed as follows:

Application form details				Component(s) included in the application
Baby details	Dependent children of eligible age for Early Learning Payment	Dependent children of eligible age for School Age Payment	Dependent children of eligible age for Best Start Foods	
✓				Pregnancy and Baby Payment
	✓			Early Learning Payment
		✓		School Age Payment
✓ (if application received from 12 August 2019 only)			✓ (if application received from 12 August 2019 only)	Best Start Foods
✗	✗	✗	✗	Unknown

Applications that included baby details are classed as applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment. From 12 August, these are also classed as being applications for Best Start Foods.

Applications are classed as being for Early Learning Payment, School Age Payment and/or Best Start Foods based on the age of dependent children included in the application, and only if the application was received after the launch date of each of these payments. If there are no children of eligible age for any of these payments the application is categorised as ‘Unknown’. The authorisation rate for unknown applications is therefore very low because the application did not include a child of eligible age. Correspondingly, the authorisation rates for Early Learning Payment, School Age Payment and Best Start Foods are higher (63%, 74% and 64% respectively) because all applications in these categories did include a child of eligible age.

From 12 August 2019, an application was counted as unsuccessful if it was denied for both Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods components. If an application is withdrawn for Best Start Grant, it is also always withdrawn for Best Start Foods.

To calculate the authorisation numbers for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment, that appear in Table 2, we looked at authorised/denied/withdrawn applications for Best Start Grant outcome only. To calculate the authorisation numbers for Best Start Foods, we looked at Best Start Foods outcome only, and not at an overall outcome as described in [Application and decision making process](#) paragraph above. Each application by a client is considered separately and any previous applications are not taken into consideration.

Application channel

It is not possible to break down applications into paper and phone before August 2019. Application channel is manually entered into the case management system for applications taken by phone or paper. In a small number of cases it is known that application channel has been manually entered incorrectly or from an external system. For these cases application channel has been classed as ‘unknown’.

Social Security Scotland implemented some service changes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic but continued to process applications and make payments. Telephone applications, in particular, were effected from late March 2020. Telephone capabilities were re-instated with reduced capacity in early July 2020.

Age and gender

In a small number of cases the date of birth of the child or the application date has been entered in the parent date of birth field in the case management system. In these cases the date of birth of the parent has been changed to ‘unknown’. Further dates of birth of the parent showed very young ages. For these applicants, we have assumed that the dates contained typographical errors and have classed age as ‘unknown’, although we cannot be certain that their date of birth contained an error.

Geography

Applications are assigned to local authority and health board by postcode using a Scottish Government lookup file. For some applications, the postcode will not match to the lookup file. This can be because the postcode is not in a Scottish local authority, or because the postcode has been introduced too recently to appear on the lookup file, for example if a property is in a new development. For postcodes that could not be matched to a Scottish local authority or health board, the postcode area was used to check whether the postcode was in Scotland or elsewhere. Non-matching postcodes from Scottish border postcode areas (postcodes starting 'DG' and 'TD') were also checked individually and assigned to Scottish local authorities or health boards or as 'non-Scottish postcodes' manually.

Postcodes are linked to client profiles and data extracts are automatically updated in the case of a client changing address. As a result, postcodes reflect the latest address of clients and may not be the same as the address at the time of application. Therefore a small number of addresses may not reflect the correct local authority or health board at the time of application, decision or payment.

Following these checks on postcodes, in this publication a very small number of applications (30, 0%) were made by people with Scottish postcodes that could not be matched to a local authority or health board. A very small proportion (305, 0%) did not include address information and therefore could not be matched to a local authority, health board or country [**Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, Table 8 and Table 11**].

A small number of payments cannot be linked to the full applicant details. These have been included in the 'unknown' geography category in order to ensure the repeatability of the analysis [**Table 11**].

First and subsequent births and multiple births

A birth is a 'first birth' if there are no other children under 16 in the household who the applicant is responsible for. This means that there are no other children for whom the applicant is receiving responsibility benefits (Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit (child element) or Pension Credit (child addition)). There are some exceptions to this where the parent is under 16, because they may have a brother or sister in the house who is under 16. 'Subsequent' births are births of either one or multiple children to an applicant who already has dependent children.

When the first birth in a household is a multiple birth (e.g. twins), for the purposes of calculating payment values the first baby to be born (e.g. the first of two twins) would be the 'first birth' and any other babies (e.g. the second of two twins) would be 'subsequent births' (the [Payment amounts](#) section has further detail on how this would be calculated). However, for the purpose of these statistics, we have counted first births of multiple babies as one 'first birth'. Similarly, multiple

births to a household that already includes children under 16 would be counted as one 'subsequent birth'.

In this publication, where an application for Pregnancy and Baby payment included baby details, but no details of other dependent children, we have classed an application as being for a first birth. Where an application for Pregnancy and Baby payment included baby details, and also details of other dependent children, we have classed an application as a subsequent birth.

Multiple births have been derived by calculating applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment that would have more than 1 child listed as expected.

Effect of redeterminations

Application decision dates, outcomes and payment amounts are updated to reflect information about redeterminations and appeals as described in the [How the data is collected](#) section. Information in tables about decisions, outcomes and payments should therefore be viewed as the final decision, outcome and payment value, after a redetermination request or appeal has been received and/or decided. This excludes the processing times table, where applications with redeterminations and appeals have been removed from the processing times calculations.

Processing time

Processing time is the number of days from the application being received to a decision being made or the application being withdrawn. It includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents from clients, but does not include additional time to make payments. It is calculated in working days. Weekends and public holidays are excluded, even if applications were processed by staff working overtime on these days. The time of day that an application was received or processed is not taken into account.

Processing times data does not include any applications that are flagged as having had a redetermination request because the decision date for these applications will represent the redetermination decision date, which can be some time after the original decision date. The number of applications in the processing times table is therefore lower than the number of applications shown as processed or decided in other tables. Redeterminations are a small proportion of the total applications processed, and the average processing times for applications that go on to redetermination or appeal compared to other applications should not differ from all other applications. Therefore, removal of these should not impact the average processing times shown in the table.

Processing time is only calculated for applications that were decided within the period being reported on. Data is presented by the month of decision rather than month the application was received.

Following introduction of Best Start Foods in August 2019, each application is being assessed against Best Start Foods and Best Start Grant eligibility criteria, which requires an additional decision to be made whether to authorise or deny Best Start Foods application. The decision is being made at the same time for both payments.

On 30 March 2020, Social Security Scotland launched an online document upload function which provides an alternative method for applicants to provide evidence.

Future developments

We will be seeking users' views on the content of this publication to ensure it best meets their requirements. If you have any comments or suggestions that you would like to provide us please email MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot.

Comparisons with Department for Work and Pensions Sure Start Maternity Grant statistics

Department for Work and Pensions published information about Sure Start Maternity Grant in the Social Fund annual report 2017 to 2018 at Great Britain level only: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-fund-annual-report-2017-to-2018>. Department for Work and Pensions also published annual expenditure for Sure Start Maternity Grants at Great Britain level in their Benefit expenditure and caseload tables:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/benefit-expenditure-tables>.

Key differences between any figures for Sure Start Maternity Grant and Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment are:

- Applicants can only apply for Sure Start Maternity Grant for their first child. No payments are made for subsequent children (with some exceptions for multiple births) whereas Pregnancy and Baby Payment is applicable for first children and subsequent children.
- Sure Start Maternity Grant payments are £500 for the first child, whereas Pregnancy and Baby Payments are £600 for the first child, £300 for subsequent children and £300 for multiple births.
- The Sure Start Maternity Grant application window is from 11 weeks before due date to 6 months after birth, whereas Pregnancy and Baby Payment is from 24th week of pregnancy to 6 months after birth.

Department for Work and Pensions does not have an equivalent of Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment.

The Department for Health and Social Care does not produce statistical publications covering the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers in Scotland. However, management information on uptake has previously been published by

the Scottish Government in a Freedom of Information response covering a 4 week period in 2018: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-18-00531/>.

Related Social Security Scotland publications

Statistics published by Social Security Scotland can be found at:

<https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-scotland-stats-publications/>

Future research and statistics publications will be available through the Social Security Scotland 'Reporting' webpage at:

<https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/what-we-do/reporting>.

Statistics on Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods feedback (complaints, compliments and suggestions) are published at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-feedback-statistics-to-31-may-2020/>.

Information on client diversity and equality of application outcomes for clients applying to Social Security Scotland is published at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-client-diversity-and-equalities-analysis-to-may-2020/>.

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How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

- are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot.
- are available via an alternative route. Summary tables are available at:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications>.
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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