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Directors of Education

17 October 2018

Dear Director

The First Minister announced in the Programme for Government that we would deliver the Best Start Pregnancy and Baby payment before Christmas 2018. This is the first payment of the Best Start Grant (BSG), the benefit which will replace and expand on the current Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) in Scotland, to support families on low incomes with the costs of having a child. I thought it would be helpful to provide you with more information about the BSG and our plans to seek your support in increasing awareness and promoting take up of the new benefit.

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 three 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. The application window is between the mother reaching 24 weeks of pregnancy to 6 months after the birth of the child.
- **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. You can apply for this from the day of the child's 2nd birthday to 6 months after his/her 3rd birthday.
- **A School Age Payment** of £250. This will help with the costs of preparing for primary school. You can apply for this 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.

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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 and School Age payments will be available by Summer 2019. We will confirm start dates as soon as we can.

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 the UK Sure Start Maternity Grant up to a total of £1,100, over 3 payments. Subsequent children, who receive nothing from the UK Government, will receive up to a total of £800. This is an increase of up to £1400 more than the current UK system for a 2 child family.

Administration of Best Start Foods (currently UK Healthy Start Vouchers), which are also in the process of being devolved to Scotland, will be integrated with BSG with to reduce effort for the applicant and administration for Social Security Scotland.

Policy and Legislation

Throughout the development of the policy we have engaged with a range of external stakeholders, service users and the wider public as well as colleagues from within Scottish Government, to ensure opinions, lessons learned and concerns were taken on board and worked through.

We consulted on draft BSG Regulations from 26 March to 15 June 2018 and received good feedback on our proposals from local authorities which allowed us to develop final policy. The Scottish Government published its [response](#) to the consultation on its website.

[The Early Years Assistance \(Best Start Grants\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2018](#) have now been laid in Parliament. This will allow the necessary scrutiny to take place to allow us to start making pregnancy and baby grant payments before Christmas 2018.

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. Our priority is to make sure that families who are entitled to these payments are aware of them, are able to access the grant when they need, and find it easy to apply.

Social Security Scotland is engaging directly with local authorities so we can work together to embed BSG promotion in services that reach young families. Between 22 October and 7 November 2018 we will be delivering a series of roadshows across the country to introduce Social Security Scotland and set out the detail of the BSG payments. We will also provide a toolkit with communication materials that organisations can disseminate to the parents that they work with. We recognise that vulnerable groups may not always engage with mainstream services so we are working closely with a wide range of third sector organisations and the advice sector, to ensure services have all they need to be able to provide the necessary support.

I'd be grateful if you could cascade this information through relevant channels to raise awareness of the BSG and the value it can add for young families in your constituency.

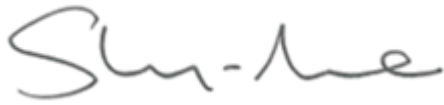
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If you have any queries meantime, please contact Rachael McKechnie at Social Security Scotland via email: localdelivery@socialsecurity.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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