

Social Security Scotland Statistics

Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods: high level statistics to 31 December 2023

Key figures

In the 2023/24 financial year to date, covering April 2023 to December 2023:

- 38,075 applications have been received for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods [Table 1].
- 48,560 applications have been processed, of which 57% were authorised for at least one Best Start Grant or Best Start Foods payment type [Table 1].
- the average (median) processing time was 13 working days [Table 10].
- £28.8 million had been paid to clients for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. [Table 12, Chart 3]

Frequency of publications

The next publication, covering up to the end of March 2024, will be released in May 2024.

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 December 2023.

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 December 2023.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please email MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot.

All tables and charts relating to this publication can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-scotland-stats-publications/>

These statistics are being published as official statistics in development. Official statistics in development may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The UK Statistics Authority has not yet assessed these statistics. They have not been designated as Accredited Official Statistics³.

³ For more information on experimental statistics please see:

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/experimental-statistics-official-statistics-in-development/>

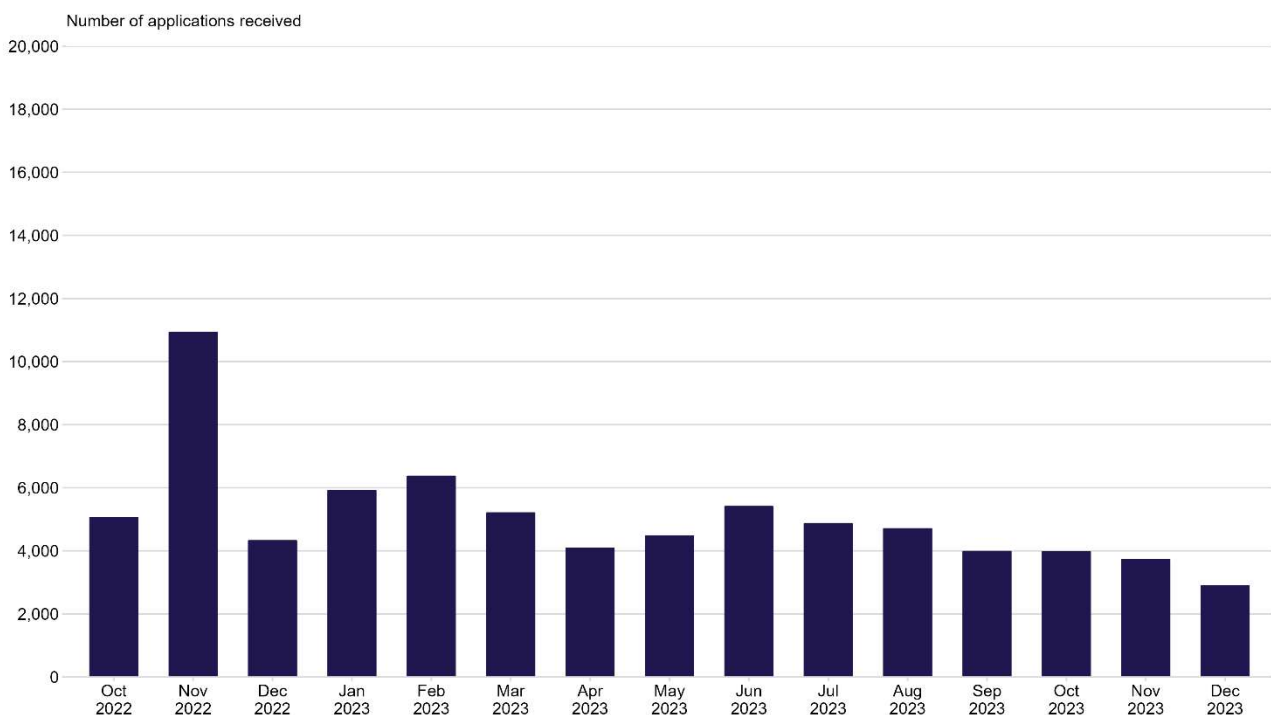
Main findings

Applications by month

- In the 2023/24 financial year to date, 38,075 applications have been received. In the same time period, 48,560 applications have been processed, with 57% of applications authorised [Table 1].
- In the latest reporting period, 3,970 applications were received in October, 3,725 in November and 2,890 in December 2023 [Table 1, Chart 1].
- In the latest reporting period, 4,400 applications were processed in October, 3,940 in November, and 2,900 in December 2023. The proportion of applications authorised was 60% in October, 57% in November and 59% in December 2023. [Table 1].
- Since the launch of the benefit in December 2018, 474,300 applications have been received for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods and 471,670 applications processed by 31 December 2023. Of these processed applications, 66% were authorised [Table 1].

The below excerpt from Table 1 summarises Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications and outcomes by financial year.

Chart 1: Applications received by month (October 2022 to December 2023) – see the corresponding Excel Tables for an all-time version.



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

Period ⁴	Total applications received	Percentage of total applications received	Total applications processed	Percentage of processed applications authorised	Percentage of processed applications denied	Percentage of processed applications withdrawn
Total	474,300	100%	471,670	66%	30%	4%
Financial Year 2018 - 2019 ⁵	19,480	4%	17,935	64%	34%	2%
Financial Year 2019 - 2020	128,075	27%	120,680	66%	29%	4%
Financial Year 2020 - 2021	118,605	25%	112,470	68%	30%	2%
Financial Year 2021 - 2022	84,235	18%	83,005	69%	24%	7%
Financial Year 2022 - 2023	85,825	18%	88,990	66%	31%	3%
Financial Year 2023 - 2024	38,075	8%	48,560	57%	41%	2%

Applications by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payment type

Of the applications received in 2023/24 to date:

- 23,455 or 62% of applications have been estimated to be for Pregnancy and Baby, based on the presence of baby details in the application form **[Table 2]**.
- 8,620 or 23% of applications have been estimated to be for Early Learning Payment, based on the details of children included in the application form. Many eligible clients may be eligible for Auto-Award of Early Learning Payment if they are in receipt of Scottish Child Payment. **[Table 2]**.

⁴ The 2019/20 financial year includes the months from April 2019 to March 2020; The 2020/21 financial year includes the months from April 2020 to March 2021; The 2021/22 financial year includes the months from April 2021 to March 2022; The 2022/23 financial year includes the months from April 2022 to March 2023; The 2023/24 financial year includes the months from April 2023 to December 2023.

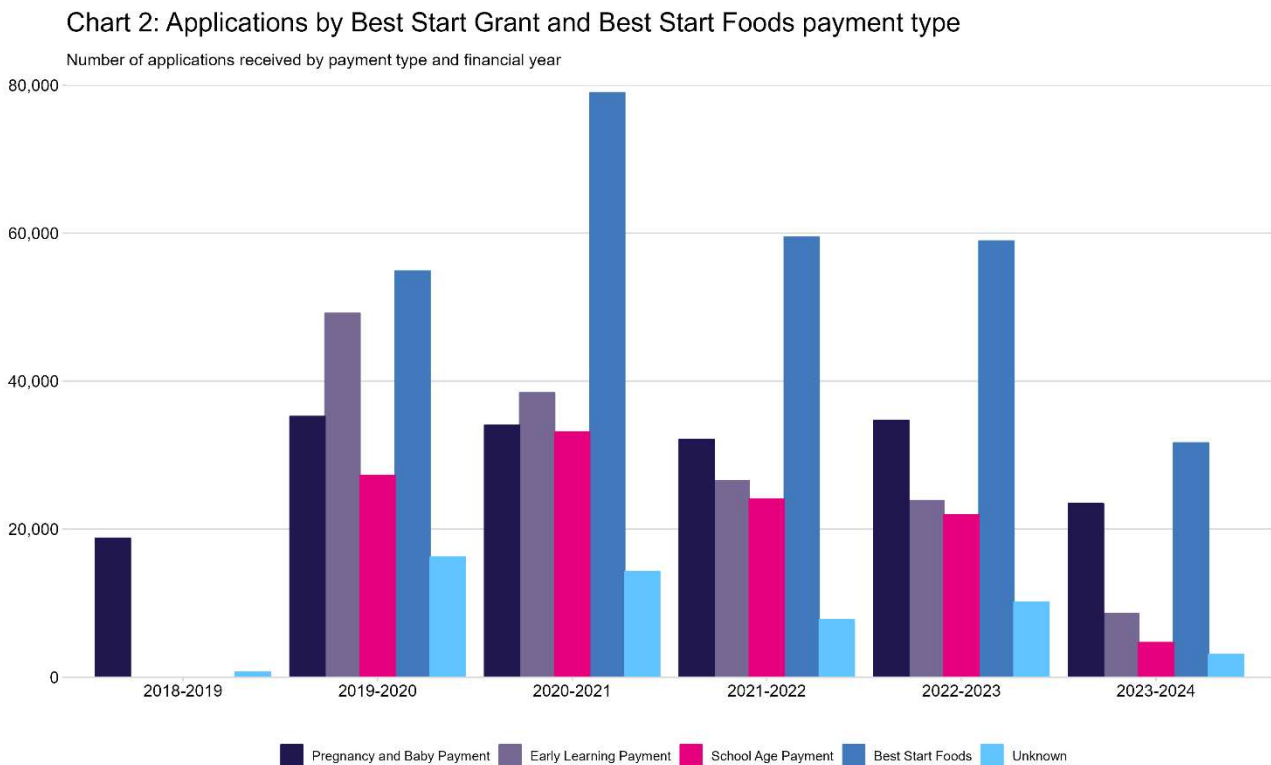
⁵ During the 2018/19 financial year, only the Pregnancy and Baby Payment was available to clients. This was launched in December 2018 and this financial period therefore only contains data for the four months from December 2018 to March 2019.

- 4,670 or 12% of applications have been estimated to be for School Age Payment, based on the details of children included in the application form. Many eligible clients may be eligible for Auto-Award of School Age Payment if they are in receipt of Scottish Child Payment. The 2023/24 application window for School Age Payment applications opened on 1 June 2023 **[Table 2]**.
- 31,665 or 83% of applications have been estimated to be for Best Start Foods, based on the details of children included in the application form **[Table 2]**.
- 3,105 or 8% of applications have been classified as unknown, due to not containing details of eligible children **[Table 2]**.

Further breakdowns by benefit type for each financial year and all time, such as applications processed and authorised, can be found in Table 2 of the Excel tables.

Applications can be authorised for one or more payments depending on eligibility. The [About the data](#) section explains how the payment being applied for is estimated.

Chart 2: Applications received by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods benefit type to 30 December 2023. Applications for multiple types of payment are counted multiple times within this chart.



Application channel (method of application)

- Around 90% of applications received by 31 December 2023 were made online, while 7% were telephone applications and 2% were paper applications. All remaining applications have been classed as 'Other channels', amounting to less than 1% of total applications [Table 3]. The [About the data](#) section has further information about the application channel data.
- The proportion of applications made online was 84% in October, 86% in November and 89% in December 2023. The remaining applications were by telephone and by paper application [Table 3].

Age group

- Around 96% of applications were made by people aged 18 to 44 in the 2023/24 financial year to date. A further 1% of applications were made by people under 18 and 2% by people aged 45 or over [Table 4]. Similar proportions were seen between launch and the end of December 2023.

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

- In the 2023/24 financial year to date, the local authorities with the highest number of applications were Glasgow City with 17% of applications, North Lanarkshire with 8% and Fife with 7%. The lowest number of applications were from Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, and Na h-Eileanan Siar which each accounted for less than 1% of applications [Table 5].
- Similarly, the health board with the highest number of applications in the 2023/24 financial year to date was Greater Glasgow and Clyde, with 27% of all applications. This was followed by Lothian with 14% and Lanarkshire with 13%. The lowest numbers of applications were from Orkney, Western Isles and Shetland respectively [Table 7].
- Less than 1% of applications received in the current financial year 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].

Information on deriving local authority and health board for applications can be found under [Geography](#) in the data quality section of this publication.

Pregnancy and Baby Payment applications for first and subsequent births

Due to a recently identified data issue, the number of applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment as broken down by birth type is not available for the current publication. We aim to address the issue and resume publishing these figures in the next upcoming publication cycle in May 2023.

More information is available in the footnotes of Table 9 and in the [About the Data](#) section of this publication.

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.
- In the latest reporting period, the median processing time for applications was 4 working days in October, 5 working days in November and 5 working days in December 2023. In the 2023/24 financial year so far, the median average processing time was 13 days **[Table 10]**.

Payments

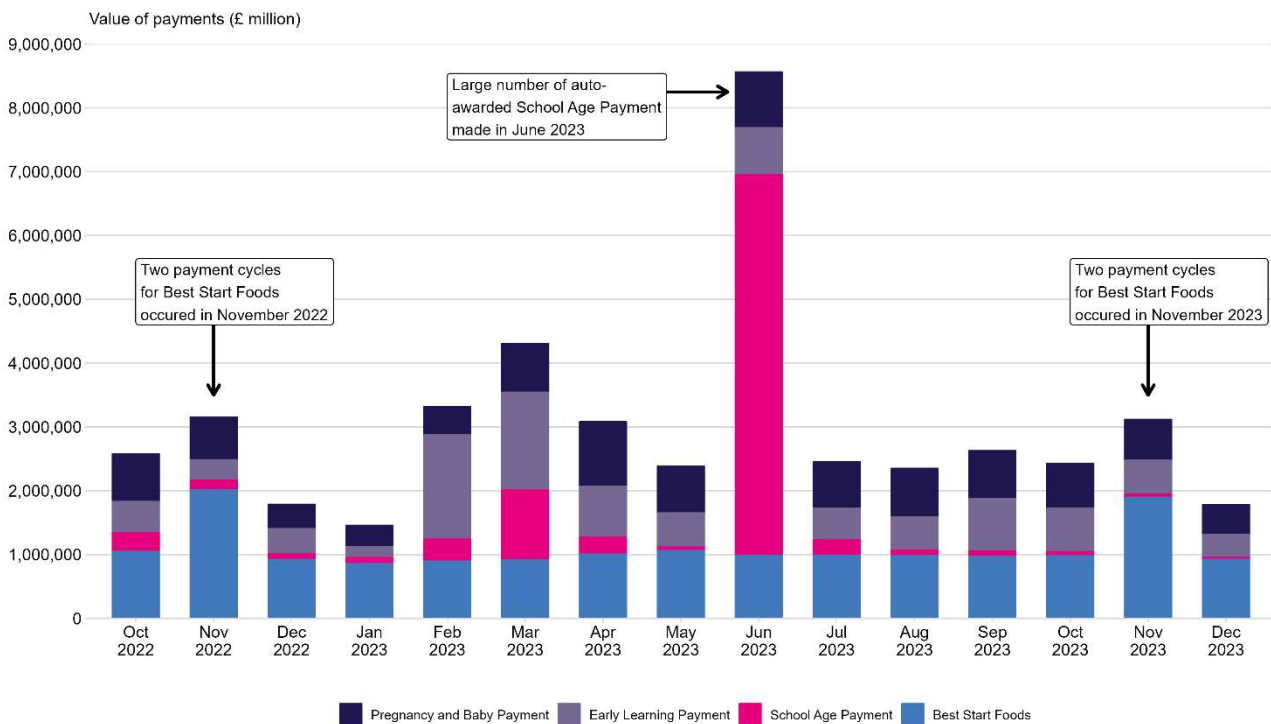
- In the 2023/24 financial year to December 2023, £28.8 million has been paid to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods clients. Of this, £6.7 million was for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, £5.5 million was for Early Learning Payment, £6.8 million was for School Age Payment, and £9.8 million was for Best Start Foods **[Table 12]**.
- The total value of Best Start Grant and Best Start Food payments paid was approximately £2.4 million in October, £3.1 million in November and £1.8 million in December 2023 **[Table 12]**.
- The all time total value of Best Start Grant and Best Start Food payments to 31 December 2023 was £145.4 million. Of this, £37.3 million was for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, £29.9 million was for Early Learning Payment, £27.4 million was for School Age Payment, and £50.8 million was for Best Start Foods **[Table 11, Table 12, Chart 3]**.
- At local authority level, the highest total value of payments was made to people in Glasgow City at £21.3 million, North Lanarkshire at £10.4 million and Fife at £10.1 million. The lowest total value of payments was made to people in Orkney Islands at £239,462, Shetland Islands at £258,336 and Na h-Eileanan Siar at £340,415 **[Table 11]**.
- Following the introduction of auto-awards in November 2022, an increasing number of payments cannot be linked to the full applicant

details and are included in the 'unknown' geography category. More information is available in the footnotes of Table 11 and in the [About the Data](#) section of this publication.

- In December 2023, 30,360 payments were issued for Best Start Foods. In the 2023/24 financial year so far, 40,925 individual clients received at least one payment for Best Start Foods [Table 12, Table 14].

The excerpt below from Table 12 summarises Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods payments by benefit type and financial year.

Chart 3: Payments issued by Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods benefit type (October 2022 to December 2023) - see the corresponding Excel Tables for an all-time version.



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

Period ⁶	Payment value	Percentage of Best Start Grant - Pregnancy and Baby Payment	Percentage of Best Start Grant -Early Learning Payment	Percentage of Best Start Grant - School Age Payment	Percentage of Best Start Foods Payment
Total	£ 196.7 million	26%	21%	19%	35%
Financial Year 2018 - 2019 ⁷	£ 4.1 million	100%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Financial Year 2019 - 2020	£ 22.5 million	30%	36%	20%	14%
Financial Year 2020 - 2021	£ 29.5 million	24%	18%	19%	39%
Financial Year 2021 - 2022	£ 28.5 million	22%	14%	16%	48%
Financial Year 2022-2023	£ 32.1 million	21%	22%	18%	39%
Financial Year 2023-2024	£ 28.8 million	23%	19%	24%	34%

Auto-awards

- A total of 47,665 auto-awarded payments were made between 28th November 2022 and 31 December 2023 with 23,290 for Early Learning Payment and 24,360 for School Age Payment. Around 15 payments had an unknown component type. Further information on auto-awards is provided in the Background section below **[Table 13]**.

Clients Paid

- In the 2023/24 financial year to end of December 2023, 68,395 individual clients were paid for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. 13,450 individuals were paid for Pregnancy and Baby Payment, 18,225 for Early Learning Grant, 22,810 for School Age Payment and 40,925 for Best Start Foods **[Table 14]**.

Re-determinations and appeals

- In the 2023/24 financial year, 545 re-determinations were requested by 31 December 2023. This represents 1.1% of the total number of applications processed during this period. The number of allowed or partially allowed

⁶ The 2019/20 financial year includes the months from April 2019 to March 2020; The 2020/21 financial year includes the months from April 2020 to March 2021; The 2021/22 financial year includes the months from April 2021 to March 2022; The 2022/23 financial year includes the months from April 2022 to March 2023; The 2023/24 financial year includes the months from April 2023 to December 2023.

⁷ 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.

re-determinations as a proportion of decisions made in the 2023/24 financial year is 0.3% **[Table 15a]**.

In the latest reporting period:

- A total of 55 re-determinations were requested in October, 55 in November and 40 in December 2023 **[Table 15a]**.
- 55 re-determination requests were completed in October, 55 in November and 40 in December 2023 **[Table 15a]**.
- 33% were allowed or partially allowed in October, 31% in November and 50% in December 2023. An allowed or partially allowed re-determination request is one where the decision is made in the clients favour **[Table 15a]**.
- The median average number of working days to respond to a re-determination request was 9 in October, 11 in November and 11 working days in December 2023 **[Table 15a]**.
- Over all time, around 95% of completed re-determinations were closed within 16 working days **[Table 15a]**.
- Over all time, 0.9% of all processed applications resulted in a re-determination request. The average number of days to respond to a re-determination request is 9 working days **[Table 15a]**.
- In the 2023/24 financial year to end of December 2023, 20 appeals have been received. Of the appeals that went to tribunal over this period, 100% were not upheld in the clients' favour **[Table 15b]**.
- A total of 150 appeals were received between launch and 31 December 2023. Of the appeals considered by the tribunal, 100 cases were not upheld in the clients' favour, whilst 5 cases were upheld in the clients' favour **[Table 15b]**.

Further information on re-determinations and appeals, including changes resulting from the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, can be found in the [background section](#).

Best Start Foods Reviews

- In the 2023/24 financial year to end of December 2023, 265 requests for a Best Start Foods review have been received. From April 2023 to December 2023, 270 reviews have been completed **[Table 16]**.
- In the latest reporting period, approximately 25 requests were received to review a Best Start Foods decision in October, 20 in November and 15 in

December 2023. In total, 35 review requests were completed in October, 20 in November, and 15 in December 2023 **[Table 16]**.

- In the latest reporting period, the median average number of working days to respond to a Best Start Foods review request was 14 in October, 14 in November and 13 working days in December 2023 **[Table 16]**.
- For all time, around 0.3% of Best Start Foods decisions resulted in a review request. The average number of days to respond to a review request was 11 days **[Table 16]**.

Background to Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods

The Scotland Act 2016⁸ gives Scottish Parliament powers over a number of social security benefits that 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 10 December 2018. This replaced the Sure Start Maternity Grant that 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 31 March 2020.

As this publication reports on applications to the end of December 2023, it spans the period when the Covid-19 pandemic was present in Scotland.

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

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 £707.25 for a first child and £353.65 for any subsequent children. There is an additional multi-birth supplement of £353.65 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.

⁸ The Scotland Act 2016 webpage at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/scotland.html>

For example, if someone has twins and one is their first child, they would receive £1,414.55. This is made up of £707.25 for the first child, £353.65 for the second child and £353.65 for having twins. An applicant having twins where none of the children is their first child would get £1,060.95. This is made up of £353.65 for each child plus a £353.65 payment for twins.

The application window is from completing 24 weeks of pregnancy 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.

On 1 April 2023, the value of the Pregnancy and Baby Payment was increased from £642.35 to £707.25 for a first child and from £321.20 to £353.65 for a subsequent child. The additional multi-birth supplement was also increased from £321.20 to £353.65.

Following amendments to Best Start Grant regulations, from 14 November 2022 some families can access the higher Pregnancy and Baby Payment even though they are not applying in relation to their first child. This provides greater support for certain families who are more likely to be starting from scratch without the items that the Pregnancy and Baby payment is intended to provide – either because they were forced to abandon the items through no fault of their own, or because they never needed to obtain them in the first place. The three groups this applies to are:

- families who first took on responsibility for their other children when those children were more than 12 months old.
- individuals granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, or leave under the Afghanistan or Ukraine resettlement schemes whose other children were born before they arrived in the UK.
- individuals who have been forced to leave their home with their other children due to domestic abuse by their partner or ex-partner.

Early Learning Payment

The Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment is a £294.70 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.

On 1 April 2023, the value of the Early Learning Payment was increased from £267.65 to £294.70.

School Age Payment

The Best Start Grant School Age Payment is a £294.70 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 primary 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.

On 1 April 2023, the value of the School Age Payment was increased from £267.65 to £294.70.

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. This application window has now closed.
Between 1 March 2016 and 28 February 2017.	Between 1 June 2021 and 28 February 2022. This application window has now closed.
Between 1 March 2017 and 28 February 2018.	Between 1 June 2022 and 28 February 2023. This application window has now closed.
Between 1 March 2018 and 28 February 2019	Between 1 June 2023 and 29 February 2024.

Best Start Foods

Best Start Foods is available to pregnant people and families who receive certain low income benefits under a certain amount. It provides a payment card that can be used to support the purchase of certain foods, liquid cow's milk and first infant formula milk for pregnant people and children under three. Eligible pregnant people and families can apply from the start of pregnancy and at any time up to their child's 3rd birthday if they are resident in Scotland and are in receipt of certain qualifying benefits.

There was transitional protection up until 31 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, administered by the Department for Health and Social

Care, were no longer available to Scottish recipients after 31 March 2020 when the UK Scheme was revoked in Scotland. Regulations to increase Best Start Foods payments from £4.50 per week to £4.95 per week came into force from 3 April 2023.

The payments of Best Start Foods are:

- £19.80 every 4 weeks during pregnancy
- £39.60 every 4 weeks from a child being born up until their 1st birthday
- £19.80 every 4 weeks for children between the ages of 1 and 3.

Eligibility

To be eligible for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, applicants must live in Scotland. The Best Start Grant qualifying benefits are: 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.

The qualifying benefits for Best Start Foods are the same as for Best Start Grant, with one exception. Working Tax Credit alone is not a qualifying benefit for Best Start Foods. In order to qualify with Working Tax Credit, applicants must also be in receipt of Child Tax Credit. Additionally, some of the benefits have an income limit for Best Start Foods. These are:

- Universal Credit – an earned income of less than £726 per month
- Child Tax Credit – an income of less than £18,725 per year
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit – an income of less than £8,717 per year
- Housing Benefit – an income of less than £358 per week.

These income thresholds were increased on 3 April 2023, following increases to the National Living Wage.

Some young parents do not need to receive a qualifying benefit. For Best Start Grant, parents under the age of 18, and parents aged 18 or 19 who are dependent on someone who is receiving benefits for them, do not need to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Someone under the age of 18 is eligible for Best Start Foods during pregnancy and up until their child turns one, without the need to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

The main person who is responsible for the child, or their partner can make applications. This includes someone who is pregnant or the parent/carer of the child; their partner; the parent/carer of the birth parent if the birth parent is dependent on them (Pregnancy and Baby Payment only); and someone who has started looking after, and is responsible for, the child e.g. a kinship carer.

Further details about the benefits and documents (e.g. legal orders and written agreements) that identify the main people responsible for looking after a child are given at <https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/>.

On 14 November 2022, the condition for Best Start Grant that the child is not looked after by the local authority in residential care was removed, aligning with the approach already taken for Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Foods.

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.

Best Start Foods eligibility is being extended to children under 3, with British citizenship, whose parent or guardian are on a low income but do not have a qualifying benefit due to having no recourse to public funds. In the meantime equivalent payments are being made. Further information about eligibility for Best Start Foods for those who have no access to public funds is available at <https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/public-funds-access>

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 three Best Start Grant 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.

On 9 November 2020, Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Scottish Child Payment. At the beginning of the application process, individuals can choose to make a joint application for Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grant, and Best Start Foods. If they choose to do this, the applicant completes one application form for all of these benefits.

In terms of processing and the subsequent reporting of official statistics, the joint application can be thought of as two separate applications; one for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods and another for Scottish Child Payment. For this reason, only Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications are reported on within this publication. Official statistics on Scottish Child Payment applications are available at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications/statistics>

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. A manager will review applications that have been approved for payment by a client advisor before payment is approved and made. Decisions within this publication are presented by the date that the client advisor makes a decision.

Social Security Scotland aims to process the application, make a decision and provide decision letters to the applicant within 30 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 approve or make payments within processing time.

Auto-award of payments

To make it easier for families to access the support they are entitled to, Social Security Scotland began on 28 November 2022 to award Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment automatically to eligible families in receipt of Scottish Child Payment.

These awards, made to individuals who are in receipt of Scottish Child Payment and who have an eligible child within the relevant Early Learning Payment or School Age Payment application window, happen automatically without the need for a new application.

Re-determinations 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 re-determination. A request for a re-determination 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 the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland, Social Security Chamber if they do not agree with Social Security Scotland's re-determination, or if Social Security Scotland is not able to make a re-determination within 16 working days.

Best Start Foods has no statutory right of appeal, meaning it does not have a re-determination 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 because of the coronavirus outbreak and are able to claim assistance to which they are entitled and which they may have missed 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 because 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 re-determination
- appealing to the First Tier Tribunal.

Additionally, the Coronavirus (Scotland) 2020 Act provided Social Security Scotland some extra time to process re-determinations. This temporary extension expired for new re-determination requests on 30 September 2021.

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 that 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 1 February 2023 has been used to produce statistics on applications received and decisions made up to 11.59 pm on 31 December 2023. 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 re-determinations and appeals.

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

Until March 2022, re-determinations were reported based on management information manually collected by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland. From April 2022 onwards, the figures reported in Table 15a are based on data extracted from the case management system. Similarly, while information on appeals are still manually collected, from October 2023 onwards the figures reported in Table 15b for appeals are based on data extracted from the case management system. This is part of an ongoing piece of work to improve the reporting of re-determinations and appeals across all benefits. As such the data source and resulting outputs are currently being reviewed and figures from April 2022 onwards may be subject to change. Best Start Foods reviews are currently still manually collected.

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

Within our statistical reporting, key dates are used to assign applications received, applications processed and payments issued to time periods. This is a different methodology to that used in financial reporting and, as a result, there may be differences in the values reported for a given time period.

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. Months that are more recent tend to be subject to a greater degree of revision than more distant ones.

A new data source is now being used for Best Start Grant re-determinations and appeals. This data source and resulting outputs are currently being reviewed and figures from April 2022 onwards may be subject to change.

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 lead statistician checks the final documents.

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, a manager approves the decision, and then a payment is issued. In some cases, payments will be issued on the same day that payments are authorised by client advisors. 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	Application form details	Application form details	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
x	x	x	x	Unknown

Applications that included baby details are classed as applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment. From 12 August 2019, 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 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 May 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 and a full telephony service was introduced from 2 November 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 were made by people with Scottish postcodes that could not be matched to a local authority or health board. A very small proportion 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, and Table 8].

A 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. The vast majority of Early Learning Payments and School Age Payments presented with an unknown address in Table 11 are the result of the introduction of auto-awarded payments on 28 November 2022 which enabled Social Security Scotland to award eligible individuals payments for Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment without the need to apply. As our current methodology for deriving the Local Authority area of a client is based on the application form submitted, the geographical location for payments are currently recorded as 'Unknown'. Development work is underway to link these payments with an alternative source of geographical location information to enable these payments to be allocated to specific local authorities in future releases [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 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 one child listed as expected.

Due to a recently discovered quality issue, the number of applications for Pregnancy and Baby Payment by birth type is not available for the current publication. Specifically, the details of children over the age of 16 have been filtered out of the underlying data extract at source. As a result, a number of "subsequent births" have been automatically reclassified as "first births" over time as other dependent children on the application pass the age of 16 and get removed from the underlying data extract. We aim to address the issue and resume publishing these figures in the next upcoming publication cycle in May 2023.

Effect of re-determinations

Application decision dates, outcomes and payment amounts are updated to reflect information about re-determinations 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 re-determination request or appeal has been received and/or decided. This excludes the processing times table, where applications with re-determinations 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 re-determination request because the decision date for these applications will represent the re-determination 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. Re-determinations are a small proportion of the total applications processed, and the average processing times for applications that go on to re-determination or appeal compared to other applications should not differ from all other applications. Therefore, removal of these should not affect 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 that provides an alternative method for applicants to provide evidence.

As part of the continuous improvement of our outputs, some changes have been made to Table 10, including the addition of further processing times intervals.

Auto-Award Issue

Following the launch of Auto-Awards for Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment to eligible Scottish Child Payment clients, a system error was discovered which had prevented the automatic check for some clients. Whilst this issue was being addressed a number of clients aged out and were therefore showing as ineligible, meaning they could not be legally approved for payment by the case management system. After identifying all impacted clients, Social Security Scotland issued ex-regulatory payments to these clients in two batches (652 Early Learning Payments on 22nd August 2023 and 236 School Age Payments on 29th September 2023) with a combined total value of £234,000. These payments are not included in our data extracts and are therefore not accounted for within the statistical publication tables.

When the Best Start Grant School Age Payment window opened on 1st June 2023, it was identified that a known system issue was preventing a number of cases suitable for auto-award of Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment from being paid. To ensure these clients received payment without the need to apply, Social Security Scotland staff implemented a workaround where applications were manually built and then immediately processed for payment. As these were not applications submitted by clients, we have taken steps to remove these applications from the presented statistics.

Potential auto-awards are contingent on a client being in receipt of Scottish Child Payment. The applications to be excluded were identified using a list of skipped Scottish Child Payment cases provided by Live Service colleagues. These cases were used to obtain unique client reference numbers which were then cross-referenced against the Best Start Grant clients who had an application in June 2023 for Early Learning Payment or School Age Payment. In total around 3,400 cases were identified and excluded from the statistics because of this analysis.

The nature of this workaround meant the resulting payments issued did not have an auto-award flag in our core data extracts. However, as the definition of an auto-

awarded payment is that a client received payment without the need to apply, steps have been taken to flag and include these payments in the auto-award payment counts reported in Table 13. In total around 3,500 payments were identified and flagged as auto-awarded payments because of this analysis.

Whilst the number of manually created applications excluded from the statistics is slightly lower than the corresponding number of payments flagged as auto-awards, the decision was taken to choose the most robust method possible for identifying cases on both sides of this issue. The resulting margin of error is approximately 100 cases.

A similar approach was taken for the July-September 2023 reporting period which resulted in a further 800 applications being excluded. For the October-December 2023 reporting period we further removed 35 such applications. A system improvement has been deployed reducing the need to repeat this process in future publications.

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 publish information about Sure Start Maternity Grant in the Social Fund annual report 2019 to 2020 at Great Britain level only: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-fund-annual-report-2019-to-2020>.

Department for Work and Pensions also publishes annual expenditure for Sure Start Maternity Grant 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 £707.25 for the first child, £353.65 for subsequent children and £353.65 for multiple births.

- The Sure Start Maternity Grant application window is from 11 weeks before due date to 6 months after birth.
- The Pregnancy and Baby Payment application window is from completing 24 weeks 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

Future research and statistics publications will be available through the Social Security Scotland 'publications' webpage at:
<https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications>.

Statistics on Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods feedback (complaints, compliments and suggestions) are published at
<https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications/statistics/statistics-collections>.

Information on client diversity and equality of application outcomes for clients applying to Social Security Scotland is published at
<https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications/statistics/statistics-collections>

Official Statistics on Scottish Child Payment applications is published at
<https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications/statistics/statistics-collections>

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Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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Office of the Chief Statistician, Telephone: 0131 244 0442,

e-mail: statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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.socialsecurity.gov.scot/publications/statistics/statistics-collections>

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.

Complaints and suggestions

If you are not satisfied with our service or have any comments or suggestions, please write to the Chief Statistician, 3WR, St Andrews House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG, Telephone: (0131) 244 0302, e-mail statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

If you would like to be consulted about statistical collections or receive notification of publications, please register your interest at www.gov.scot/scotstatf

Details of forthcoming publications can be found at www.gov.scot/statistics

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