

Social Security Scotland (Act) 2018: progress report 2019-2020

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Contents

Section number	Title	Page No
	Foreword	
1	Purpose of the Report	4
2	Introduction	4
3	Performance of the System and Delivery of the Charter	5
4	Equality Assessment and Data	15
5	Right to appeal	17

Foreword



The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, enacted on 1 June 2018, gave Scotland a unique opportunity to establish a new social security system for the people of Scotland, and to do so with dignity, fairness and respect at the heart of everything we do.

This report provides a progress update on the implementation of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (the 2018 Act) from 1 April 2019 until the end of March 2020, and focusses on the policy aspects where the Scottish Government has a particular role and duty to report. The report is designed to complement Social Security Scotland's own comprehensive progress report which focusses on operational aspects.

Much was achieved during the year covered by the report, with aspects within Part 1 of the 2018 Act being progressed and delivered including the design and introduction of the Charter Measurement Framework, key steps towards the delivery of an advocacy service and the introduction of the Benefit Take Up Strategy. Although promoting take-up is a duty placed upon the Scottish Government by the 2018 Act, it is more than that. It is a moral imperative, and a fundamental priority, which feeds into our wider commitments around tackling poverty and inequalities in all forms.

It's was also a successful year for implementing Scottish benefits, with the delivery of Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment, Best Start Grant School Age Payment, Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant.

The Scottish Government face considerable challenges ahead such as COVID- 19 and EU Exit. Every one of us is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic gripping the world and it brings with it inevitable impacts for some of the most vulnerable in society. The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are doing everything possible to provide crucial support to people in Scotland during this difficult time, and we introduced emergency Coronavirus legislation to help us manage this.

I am grateful for the support and advice the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland have received over the last year. I look forward to working together with our stakeholders over the next year to continue our work at pace and to meeting our ultimate goal of delivering an outstanding social security system with respect and dignity at its heart.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Sille'.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People

Section 1 Purpose of Report

This report is published under Section 20 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (the Act) which requires Scottish Ministers to report annually on the performance of the Scottish social security system. The social security system is defined in the Act as the system for giving assistance to individuals in accordance with Part 2 of the Act and regulations made under Part 3. Part 2 covers the type of assistance which would be paid by Scottish Ministers and the processes for determining entitlement from application to appeal.

Section 20 of the Act also sets out the requirements for the content of the report. It must include what has been done in the past year to meet the expectations on Scottish Ministers set out in the Charter. This report will therefore be published alongside our report on the Charter Measurement Framework which will confirm how well we are delivering against the commitments set out in the Charter and help us to improve that delivery.

The report should also contain an assessment of how the Scottish social security system has affected the circumstances of people whose finances are affected by a person in the household having a protected characteristic listed in section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 (for example age, disability).

The report is to be published and laid in Parliament as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year.

This report also contains an update on delivery of duties in Part 1 of the Act between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, such as in relation to the Charter, the strategy to promote take up, and work of the Scottish Commission on Social Security. Although these aspects are not required by the Act they are being provided during the implementation period to give a fuller picture of progress in delivering the new Scottish social security powers. This reporting may not be required in the longer term and will be reviewed at the appropriate time.

The report should also be read alongside the annual report published by Social Security Scotland. That report contains more of the detail on the performance of the Scottish social security system and operational delivery including information on the payments made by it up to the end of March 2020. Social Security Scotland's annual report also includes its audited annual accounts and delivery of its Strategic Objectives. Both reports together provide a full picture of delivery of the system.

Section 2 Introduction

The Act creates the legal framework under which nine types of social security assistance will be given to people by Scottish Ministers. These forms of assistance are:

- Carer's assistance
- Cold-spell heating assistance
- Winter heating assistance
- Disability assistance

- Early years assistance
- Employment-injury assistance
- Funeral expense assistance
- Housing assistance
- Short-term assistance

Scottish Ministers are also given the power to make regulations establishing schemes to top-up social security assistance paid to people by the UK Government. The Act provides directly for Scottish Ministers to make the Carer's Allowance Supplement, a top-up to Carer's Allowance, which is paid on behalf of Scottish Ministers by the UK Government. Sections 79 and 95 of the Act allows Scottish Ministers to introduce Scottish Child Payment.

The Act sets out key features of the Scottish social security system. These include:

- the definition of 8 Scottish social security principles as a foundation for the system;
- the creation of a Scottish social security charter, which sets out standards for the provision of social security in Scotland that are aligned with the Scottish social security principles;
- the establishment of a Scottish Commission on Social Security which, amongst other things, is to be involved in the scrutiny of legislation and report on the extent to which the expectations set out in the Charter are being fulfilled;
- duties on Scottish Ministers to promote the take-up of Scottish social security;
- a requirement for Scottish Ministers to ensure that suitable advocacy support is available for those who, due to a disability, need that help to navigate the Scottish social security system; and
- a requirement for Scottish Ministers to report annually to the Scottish Parliament on the performance of the Scottish social security system.

Section 87 of the Act also requires Scottish Ministers to report on the number of individuals who had the right to appeal against a Scottish social security decision and the number of individuals who exercised that right to appeal. Scottish Ministers must also indicate whether they consider that the process to determine entitlement needs to be amended.

Going forward, the requirement for, as well as the format and content of both the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland's annual reports will be reviewed to ensure that material is not duplicated whilst maintaining the reporting requirements of the Act.

Section 3 Performance of the System and Delivery of the Charter

This section provides an update on the Scottish Government's activity to deliver the requirements of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 in the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. As identified earlier, this information should be considered alongside Social Security Scotland's annual report which sets out the parallel and

complementary activity that the Agency has carried out to deliver the Scottish social security system.

Duty to promote take-up

Sections 8 and 9 of the Act require Scottish Ministers to prepare, publish and lay before Parliament a strategy to promote the take-up of Scottish social security assistance.

The first Benefit Take-Up Strategy was published on 21 October 2019, one year from the commencement of the relevant sections of the Act. Since publication Scottish Government have undertaken a number of new activities which aim to progress the ultimate goal of increasing awareness of and supporting access to Scottish benefits. The Scottish Government has:

- awarded £600,000 to 26 third sector organisations to support work to promote take-up. The successful projects will deliver against two funds – the first aims to prepare staff to support hard to reach groups who will be applying for Scottish benefits, and the second to ensure people are aware of the financial support available to them. Since the successful projects were announced on 27th February 2020, officials have worked with organisations to ensure the projects that secured the funding remain viable in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic
- established a stakeholder take-up reference group. This group provides advice and support in the implementation of the take-up strategy, as well as feeding into the development of the next strategy. Membership of the group includes representatives from third sector organisations, Local Authorities and NHS
- established a Cross-Government Income Maximisation Working Group to ensure a coordinated approach to initiatives across the Scottish Government
- developed marketing campaigns and materials to support the promotion of benefits currently being delivered by Social Security Scotland including best practice guidance with examples of practice in promoting/supporting benefit take-up, to support third sector organisations and Local Authorities
- produced a suite of resources for stakeholders, which can be accessed digitally or ordered in print. The Scottish Government have also worked with stakeholders to create bespoke products for groups including the Gypsy Traveller community as well as producing promotional materials in nine languages. These languages were selected following stakeholder feedback.

The next Benefit Take-up Strategy will be published within 3 years of Section 9 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 coming into force (in force at 22 October 2018).

Inclusive communication and accessible information

As required by Section 4 of the Act, Social Security Scotland continues to give regard to the importance of communicating in an inclusive way. Social Security Scotland continue to develop an inclusive communication strategy to ensure that people are able to engage with the organisation in a manner that best suits them. We also have the requirement to communicate inclusively in our Corporate Plan and Our Charter.

An Inclusive Communication Reference Group has been created and includes over 20 representatives from organisations across a wide range of client groups. This group provides expert advice to ensure that inclusive communication principles are embedded across the organisation.

Communication support is in place for Carer's Allowance Supplement, Best Start Grant, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant. This communication support includes language interpretation, translation, and transcription of information in over 100 languages.

Section 5 of the Act requires that Scottish Ministers must have regard to the importance of providing information in a way that is accessible for individuals who have a sensory, physical or mental disability. Information for benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland is available to clients in alternative formats, including braille, large print, audio channels and, where requested, Easy Read. British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact the Agency through the Contact Scotland provision for public sector bodies, ensuring they are able to access the social security system. Contact Scotland is a Scottish Government service that connects deaf BSL users across the country through an online BSL interpreting video relay service with all of Scotland's public authorities and voluntary organisations.

However, it is recognised that there are limitations in the current Contact Scotland provision to support future benefit delivery. The Scottish Government are therefore expanding services to support deaf and hearing impaired Social Security Scotland clients. Work is also ongoing to develop a range of contact channels, offering greater choice of how clients can engage with the Agency, as well as introducing a standard for the physical accessibility of Social Security Scotland locations for face to face engagement.

Advocacy

The 2018 Act requires Scottish Ministers to make advocacy support available to disabled people who require it to help them claim Scottish social security entitlements.

The Scottish Government [consulted](#) on a set of draft service standards for a Social Security Advocacy service between 11 July and 7 October 2019. Following that consultation, formal Service Standards were [published](#) on 31 January 2010.

Regulations were then brought forward, coming into force on 27th March 2020, which committed the Scottish Government to providing this service from 30 June 2020.

Because advocacy support is aimed at people with disabilities, the introduction of a comprehensive advocacy service in Scotland was timed to coincide with the introduction of Scottish disability benefits, in particular the Child Disability Payment which was scheduled for introduction in the summer of 2020. The Scottish Government undertook a tendering exercise between December 2019 and February 2020 for an organisation to coordinate such a service across the country in time for the introduction of CDP. However, the Coronavirus crisis changed plans for the introduction of disability benefits and it was necessary to end the tendering exercise before it had been concluded.

However, as it was anticipated that there may still be some demand for the service, from disabled people who are seeking to apply for the existing seven Scottish benefits, as well as for Scottish Child Payment once it is introduced, work commenced to implement an interim service. This was implemented and commenced on 30 June.

Scottish Commission on Social Security

The Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) is an independent advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (“NDPB”). Its primary purpose is to provide scrutiny of the Scottish social security system (including benefit regulations). SCoSS was established on 21 January 2019 as per section 21 of the Act.

The Act sets out a key role for SCoSS in providing independent scrutiny on legislative proposals and advice to Scottish Ministers to support them in achieving a social security service which is human rights based, respects the dignity of individuals and contributes to reducing poverty in Scotland.

Since its formation, SCoSS has successfully appointed a chair and board and begun scrutinising draft regulations.

- its first report was published in May 2019 on the Scottish Government’s proposals on a Young Carers Grant
- SCoSS published its second report in October 2019 on Uprating, and published its most recent report in January 2020, followed by a supplementary report in February 2020, on Scottish Child Payment
- SCoSS then laid its scrutiny report for Disability Assistance for Children and Young People in March 2020, setting out their recommendations in relation to the regulations
- SCoSS has also held their first ever stakeholder event on the Scottish Child Payment. The event was attended by 25 stakeholders which allowed SCoSS to hear the informed views of parents and other key stakeholders

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant making substantial changes to the planned delivery of benefits and has therefore had a major impact on the planned work for SCoSS.

SCoSS has set out some areas where the body may be able to add value in light of the revised legislative scrutiny timetable, and officials will be mindful of this offer as we move forward. In the meantime, Scottish Government is keeping SCoSS informed of any updates on the introduction of Wave 2 benefits and the timetable for scrutiny of draft regulations.

Our Charter and the Charter Measurement Framework

The Social Security Charter was passed unanimously by Parliament and launched at the start of 2019. It received positive feedback from people in Scotland, stakeholders, and experts.

The Act makes it clear that the approval of the Charter is not an end, rather it is the initial blueprint for how the new social security system will function. The Framework is the next step; it will ensure that we openly and transparently report on how well we are doing in delivering the commitments in the Charter. Further it will deliver robust evidence that allows Ministers to be held accountable by the Scottish Parliament.

On 17 October 2019, we published a measurement framework that sets out a strong commitment from Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to openly and honestly report on the extent to which we are delivering the commitments in the Charter. Like the new Social Security System in Scotland the framework is innovative and challenging. It will be populated with bespoke data and the results will be published annually.

Like Our Charter itself the framework was co-designed with people with lived experience of the social security system. A diverse group of 20 took part in a series of workshops, they took advice from the Scottish Commission on Social Security and representatives from a range of stakeholder groups – professionals who represent the interests of, and work on behalf of, social security clients.

The measures look at how Social Security Scotland operates and delivers benefits, including how the agency treats clients, if staff are well supported and how systems are working. They also look at Scottish Government policy, what the new system is doing as a whole and what is being achieved over the longer term.

Support for carers

Carers make an immense contribution to our society and the Scottish Government believes it is unfair that Carer's Allowance, currently paid at £67.25 a week, is the lowest of all working age reserved benefits. That is why in 2018 we introduced the Carer's Allowance Supplement.

In 2019-20, Carer's Allowance Supplement provided a twice-yearly payment of £230.10 to carers in Scotland in receipt of Carer's Allowance, benefiting some of Scotland's carers on the lowest incomes and with the most intensive caring roles with an extra £460.20 a year. The Supplement increases Carer's Allowance by 13%,

thereby exceeding the level of Jobseekers Allowance in Scotland. Between 2019-20, 78,125 carers benefited from Carer's Allowance Supplement payments.

As a part of our commitment to uprate our Scottish Social Security benefits in accordance with inflation, the Supplement was increased from £226.20 to £230.10 between 2019 and 2020 to reflect the current cost of living. Last year, we invested over £320 million in supporting Scotland's carers through Carer's Allowance and Carer's Allowance Supplement combined.

Young Carer Grant

The Young Carer Grant, the first of its kind in the UK, is a payment of £305.10 available to 16, 17 and 18 year-olds who spend a weekly average of 16 hours caring for someone who receives a disability benefit. Over 1,000 young carers in Scotland have already qualified for this support since Social Security Scotland began accepting applications on 21 October 2019. The grant is designed to support young carers to look after their own health and wellbeing, while reducing any negative impact of caring and improving access to opportunities. Young Carer Grant statistics published in February 2020 show an investment of £287,100 in Scotland's young carers. The interim evaluation report for Young Carer Grant will be published next spring, helping us understand if the benefit is, as part of the wider Scottish Government support package for young carers, delivering on its policy intent.

Carer benefits policy - Covid-19 response

Towards the end of the 2019-20 reporting year, we started responding to the coronavirus pandemic. Our priority was to maintain access to existing benefits. So, we worked with DWP to relax some of the rules around Carer's Allowance eligibility during the pandemic. For example, where people are not able to provide 35 hours of care because they, or the person they are caring for, are ill or self-isolating due to coronavirus, their Carer's Allowance will continue to be paid.

Urgent changes were also made via the emergency Coronavirus (Scotland) Act to protect access to the Young Carer Grant by relaxing the rules around timings for applications. For example, if a young carer applies after their 19th birthday, their application will be treated as though it were on time, even if they were delayed in applying.

Best Start Grant

Introduction of the Best Start Grant (BSG) is complete, with all three payments now being made by Social Security Scotland. The BSG has been welcomed across Scotland by families both in and out of work. The payments aim to give children the best start in life by providing financial support to eligible parents and carers during key transition points in children's early years:

- the Pregnancy and Baby Payment opened for applications on 10 December 2018 and helps with expenses associated with pregnancy or with having a new child

- the Early Learning Payment opened for applications on 29 April 2019 and helps with the costs of early learning around the time a child might start nursery
- the School Age Payment opened for applications on 3 June 2019 and provides financial support around the time a child is first old enough to start primary school

The BSG represents significant additional investment by the Scottish Government in comparison to the UK Government's Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) provision which it replaces. An eligible two child family will receive BSG payments totalling £1,900 in their children's early years; £1,400 more than the SSMG.

Funeral Support Payment

Social Security Scotland began taking applications for the Funeral Support Payment in September 2019. This is a one-off payment to help eligible people who are on certain low income benefits or tax credits meet the costs of a funeral. The benefit is intended to help alleviate the burden of debt clients may face when paying for a funeral and so help to reduce funeral poverty.

The Scottish Government have substantially widened eligibility for Funeral Support Payment, supporting 40% more people compared to the UK Government funeral payment which it replaces in Scotland.

The Funeral Support Payment's standard flat rate for expenses such as funeral director fees, a coffin, and flowers was £700 at the point of introduction. However, we have since increased this amount to £1,000 for all applications received from 1 April 2020; and at the same time we uprated the lower flat rate in line with inflation from £120 to £122.05. We will continue to annually uprate these elements of the payment taking into account the impact of inflation. UK Government has given no commitment to do this.

Disability Assistance

Work to develop policy proposals for the delivery of Disability Assistance in Scotland continued throughout 2019 and 2020. The consultation, 'Improving Disability Assistance in Scotland' concluded in Spring 2019 and the Scottish Government published the analysis report and a response to the feedback received in October 2019.

The feedback received through that consultative exercise supported the development of draft regulations, the Disability Assistance for Children and Young People, now known as Child Disability Payment (CDP). The draft regulations were sent to the Scottish Commission for Social Security under the duty conferred on the Scottish Ministers by section 97 of the 2018 Act. SCoSS laid its scrutiny report before Parliament on 6 March 2020 setting out their recommendations in relation to the regulations.

The Scottish Government has progressed work to deliver the 'Rising 16s' manifesto commitment to ensure that clients receiving Disability Living Allowance for children (DLAC) who turn 16 from 1 September 2020 will not be required to apply for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). As executive competence for disability benefits transferred to the Scottish Ministers on 1 April 2020, devolved powers will be used to extend the upper entitlement age of DLAC, for existing DLAC clients in Scotland, to age 18 in advance of the commencement of the Child Disability Payment.

Scottish Child Payment

The Scottish Child Payment (SCP) was announced in June 2019, utilising the powers set out in Section 79 of the Scotland Act 2018 - which enables the Scottish Government to top up reserved benefits.

The Payment is being introduced as one of a range of measures committed to in the first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, tackling child poverty for those families in receipt of low income reserved benefits. It aligns with the principles set out under Section 1 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, in particular that the social security system should contribute to reducing poverty.

The Payment will pay the equivalent of £10 a week every four weeks to eligible low income families with no cap on the number of children under 16 a family can claim for.

In recognition of the fact that of all children in poverty, almost 60% live in a family where a child is under six years old, we have committed to introducing the payment for this age group ahead of the full rollout of the benefit.

The SCP is being delivered through secondary legislation, and draft regulations have been scrutinised by the SCoSS, who published a scrutiny report in January 2020, followed by a supplementary report in February 2020. The Scottish Government will publish a response to this report and lay the regulations ahead of the Payment's launch later this year. The regulations will be accompanied by the publication of a set of Impact Assessments.

We have engaged extensively with a range of stakeholders throughout the Payment's development. Policy engagement has included anti-poverty organisations, think tanks, academia and local authorities. The views of people with lived experience of applying for and receiving benefits have also been captured through a range of user research activities across Scotland. To date over 300 users have been engaged, including charity workers, welfare officers, kinship carers and groups across the protected characteristics. We have issued a survey to Experience Panel members seeking views on the design of the Scottish Child Payment and engaged with individual members to test the prototype and paper forms.

Uprating

Carer's Allowance and Carer's Allowance Supplement were uprated by the September 2018 Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 2.4% from April 2019. During discussions with the Social Security Committee regarding this uprate, Scottish Ministers gave a commitment that the Scottish Government would engage with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Commission on Social Security in the consideration of the uprating measures that may be applied by Scottish Ministers in future years.

A comprehensive [report](#), including analytical evidence, was provided to the Social Security Committee and the Scottish Commission on Social Security on 2 September 2019. The report recommended that the assistance payment would be uprated with the September CPI rate and rounded to the nearest five pence.

The Commission was supportive of the Scottish Government's uprating policy at least in the short-term and made [recommendations](#) to which the Scottish Government [responded](#). The Social Security Committee also noted the Scottish Government's position on uprating of devolved assistance and had no further views to report beyond the discussion at the [Committee on 10 October 2019](#).

Section 77 and 78 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 ('the Act') were commenced on 30 October 2019. This placed a duty on Scottish Ministers, under section 77 of the Act, to consider the effects of inflation on all devolved assistance that were being delivered at that time and to report to the Scottish Parliament on what the Scottish Ministers intended to do as a result of the changes to inflation. Under section 78 of the Act there was also a duty to uprate by inflation Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant for the 2020/21 financial year.

[The section 77 report](#) was published on 7 February 2020. Funeral Support Payment, Young Carer Grant, Carer's Allowance and Carer's Allowance Supplement were to be uprated through September 2019 CPI of 1.7% from April 2020. In addition to the uprate by price inflation to the standard rate of the other expenses element of the Funeral Support Payment, it was to be further increased to £1,000 from April 2020.

Offences and Investigations

Following extensive consultation with stakeholders¹ the Social Security Assistance (Investigation of Offences) (Scotland) Regulations 2020² came into force on 24 January 2020 creating specific powers for Social Security Scotland to undertake investigative activity where necessary into suspected fraud in claims for benefits paid under the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. It also created a new offence of obstruction of an investigation.

The regulations were accompanied by the statutory Code of Practice for Investigations³ which sets out how officers from Social Security Scotland will

¹ <https://consult.gov.scot/social-security/fraud-investigations/>

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/11/contents/made>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-fraud-code-practice-investigations/>

investigate suspected fraud and what clients can expect in the course of an investigation.

In preparation for recurring benefits, work has continued throughout the year with the Department and Work and Pensions to develop processes that are consistent with the principle of dignity and respect, and that can be applied in common interest investigations where there is fraud across multiple benefits or spanning periods during which both agencies have overpaid benefit.

Coronavirus Emergency Legislation

The Scottish Government introduced legislation to ensure that Social Security Scotland clients are not disadvantaged by the Coronavirus crisis and are able to claim assistance to which they are entitled and which they may otherwise have missed out on if late applications were not allowed.

Section 8 and Schedule 7 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 were commenced on 01 April 2020, and relax timescales set out in the Social Security (Scotland) Act in relation to applications, redeterminations and appeal requests. These are set out below:

Redetermination and appeal requests

- Clients are able to submit re-determination requests for up to one year from the date of receiving the original decision provided they have 'good reason' for doing so. Covid-19 disruption related reasons will fall within the 'good reason' description.
- The maximum one year time period for making a re-determination and appeal request will be disapplied where clients can show that the delay is due to Covid-19 disruption.
- Social Security Scotland will make the redetermination as soon as reasonably practicable within a new extended timescale. The original timescale of 16 working days is extended by an additional 9 weeks.

Application for assistance

- The Act allows for late applications across all forms of assistance to be accepted and considered where the lateness is due to coronavirus. This will also include applications where someone loses their entitlement to assistance due to their age as a direct result of coronavirus, for example in relation to Young Carer's Grant or Best Start Grant.

The majority of measures in the Bill will automatically expire six months after coming into force. They may be extended for two further periods of six months if necessary, giving a maximum duration of 18 months.

Section 4 Equality Assessment and Data

The Act specifies that the annual report should contain an assessment of how the Scottish social security system has affected the circumstances of people whose finances are affected by a person in the household having a protected characteristic listed in section 4 of the Equality Act 2010 (for example age, disability).

As with last year's report, the assessment of the impact on those with protected characteristics is partial, as only Best Start Grant and Carers Allowance Supplement were paid during the lifetime of the 2019-20 financial year. Funeral Support Payment and Young Carers Grant were implemented part way through the period. Data are gathered in a number of ways. In some cases, data are a routine part of the application. Up to December 2019, data were also collected through a voluntary equalities monitoring questionnaire. Since December 2019, data on how individuals identify with respect to equalities are now collected within the application, although it is possible for an applicant to select that they prefer not to answer the question.

Protected characteristics can affect household finance in two ways – one is if the characteristic is deemed to require specific support in the benefit system, and creates an eligibility for the benefit, for example, Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Birth payment, or disability payments (which will be delivered Social Security Scotland in the future). Secondly, a protected characteristic may be related to how likely an individual will be in the circumstances where they are eligible to claim benefits for low income.

The Scottish Government are able to identify those instances, where having a protected characteristic will directly impact on financial circumstances (e.g. the cost of disability or pregnancy) and record where benefits address this. Other impacts are more indirect (e.g. discrimination affecting access to employment), and are thus more difficult to quantify or assess the role benefits play in counteracting them.

The Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment is made to households where there is someone who is, or has recently been, pregnant. By 31 March 2020, 26,790 payments had been approved, adding £10.7 million to family budgets. Of these payments, 31 per cent were £600 payments for a first birth, and 69 per cent were £300 payments for a subsequent birth⁴.

Best Start Foods launched in Scotland in August 2019 to replace the UK Healthy Start voucher scheme. It provides pregnant women and families with children under the age of three, who are in receipt of certain benefits, with a minimum of £4.25 a week to purchase healthy foods using a payment card. By 31 March 2020, 30,455 applications had been authorised.

Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods share an integrated application process. Of all the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods applications that were authorised for payment by 31 March 2020, 48,630 (53 per cent) were for applicants under 30.

⁴ [Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods: High level statistics to 31 March 2020](#)

With respect to Carer's Allowance Supplement, it is not possible from current data to say what the relationship is between the carer and the person who receives care. However, it is likely that a proportion of recipients will be providing care to a member of their household who must be a person in receipt of a specified disability benefit. In those circumstances, the additional support provided in 2019/20 – up to £452.40, through two payments of £226.20 – was a contribution to the carer's income which may have had an impact on the household overall. These payments were increased to £230.10 for 2020-21.

Women are disproportionately represented in the client group for Carer's Allowance Supplement, being 69 per cent of the client group for Carer's Allowance. In addition, 45 per cent of claimants for Carer's Allowance are aged over 50⁵.

The Young Carer Grant was launched in October 2019. At the end of February 2020, 1030 awards had been authorised. Just under half of these (47 per cent) were paid to 16 year-olds, 34 per cent to 17 year olds and 18 per cent to 18 year olds⁶.

In terms of the overall diversity of those applying for benefits through Social Security Scotland (for 2019-20, this includes Best Start Grant, Funeral Support Payment and Young Carer Grant), applicants were asked to complete a voluntary Equality Monitoring and Feedback form alongside their application. The response was relatively low (below five per cent), and since December 2019, equality monitoring questions are now a mandatory part of the application process (with a “prefer not to say” option). A further issue with the data is that that it is overwhelmingly drawn from the group applying for the Best Start Grants (95 per cent).

Accordingly, 50 per cent of the clients who responded were in the 25-34 age group (compared to 16 per cent of the population), as to apply for BSG, parents would tend to have a child under six. Most notably respondents tended to be women (91 per cent, compared to 51 per cent of the population). There were slight skews towards minority ethnic groups (7 per cent compared to 5 per cent in the population), respondents identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (6 per cent compared to 3 per cent of the population) rather than heterosexual (92 per cent compared to 95 per cent of the population), and 61 per cent reported having “no religion” compared to 50 per cent of the population. This latter point may be because 92 per cent of respondents were aged 16-44, where 63 per cent of the population report having no religion⁷.

Further insight into Social Security Scotland's client base may be gained through a forthcoming all-client survey that will ask clients about their experiences and protected characteristics on a rolling basis shortly after their application. In addition, qualitative research will be undertaken with clients to gather insights into the impact they believe the benefit had on their quality of life, supporting an evaluation of the impact of the devolved benefits. Evaluations for Carer's Allowance Supplement and

⁵ [Social Security for Scotland: update March 2020](#)

⁶ [Young Carer Grant: high level statistics to 29 February 2020](#)

⁷ [Social Security Scotland client diversity and equalities analysis to December 2019](#)

Best Start Grant (interim) are nearing completion will be published during Autumn 2020.

Carers in Scotland are predominantly female and on generally on lower incomes than those without caring responsibilities. For example, around two thirds of Carer's Allowance recipients are female. As well as benefitting the carer themselves, carer benefits will have an indirect positive impact on disabled people, as the person the carer looks after will be disabled.

Scottish Government officials have worked alongside carer organisations and wider stakeholders to ensure information and advice on Carer's Allowance Supplement is as accessible as possible. This was achieved through carer support organisations making this information available in a range of formats. The communications around the Supplement were also shaped by research undertaken with Experience Panels, speaking directly to carers with lived-experience to inform improvements to our communications. For the Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement, input from stakeholder organisations on our communications and ensured that information on this new payment was available in a range of formats, including video and BSL video.

Section 5 Right to appeal

Scottish Ministers must indicate, as part of this report, whether it is appropriate to amend the process for determining entitlement. Given the volume of appeals is low and there is no clear indication of issues around the application and determination process Scottish Ministers do not consider that there is any need for change at this time.

Appeals data will be kept under review and, as required, Scottish Ministers will report annually on whether the determination process needs to be amended.

The redeterminations and appeal data will be included in Social Security Scotland's Annual report.



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