

Children's Parliament

Consultation on the Best Start Grant

April 2018



Contents

- 3** About the consultation
- 4** Background Information: Summary of child poverty report
 - What is child poverty?
 - Recommendations
 - Final messages
- 6** Caring for Children
 - Who is responsible for looking after a child?
 - Responsibilities
 - Worries
- 10** Payments
 - What is a grant?
 - Maternity payment
 - Nursery payment
 - School payment
- 12** What difference could the Best Start Grant make?
- 14** Questions
- 15** Spreading the word
- 16** About Children's Parliament

Acknowledgements

Thank you to MCPs and staff from our partner schools:

Auchinraith Primary School, South Lanarkshire
McLean Primary School, Fife
St. Ronan's Primary School, Scottish Borders



Children's Parliament
Summerhall
Edinburgh
EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030

www.childrensparliament.org.uk
info@childrensparliament.org.uk

 [@creative_voices](https://twitter.com/creative_voices)

© Children's Parliament 2018
Registered as a Scottish Charity SC026247

 We acknowledge the support of the Scottish Government through a CYPFEIF and ALEC Fund Grant

About the consultation

As part of the new social security powers devolved to Scotland in the Scotland Act 2016, Scottish Government is planning to introduce a new benefit called the Best Start Grant. The Best Start Grant is split into three payments providing support to lower income families during key transition periods in a child's early years and aims to help mitigate the effects of child poverty and material deprivation. The payment amounts are: Maternity and New Baby Payment: £600 for a first child and £300 for any subsequent child; Nursery/Early Learning Payment: £250; School Payment: £250.

In addition to a wider public consultation on the draft regulations for the Best Start Grant, Scottish Government commissioned Children's Parliament to deliver a consultation with children to explore their views on and ideas for the Best Start Grant.

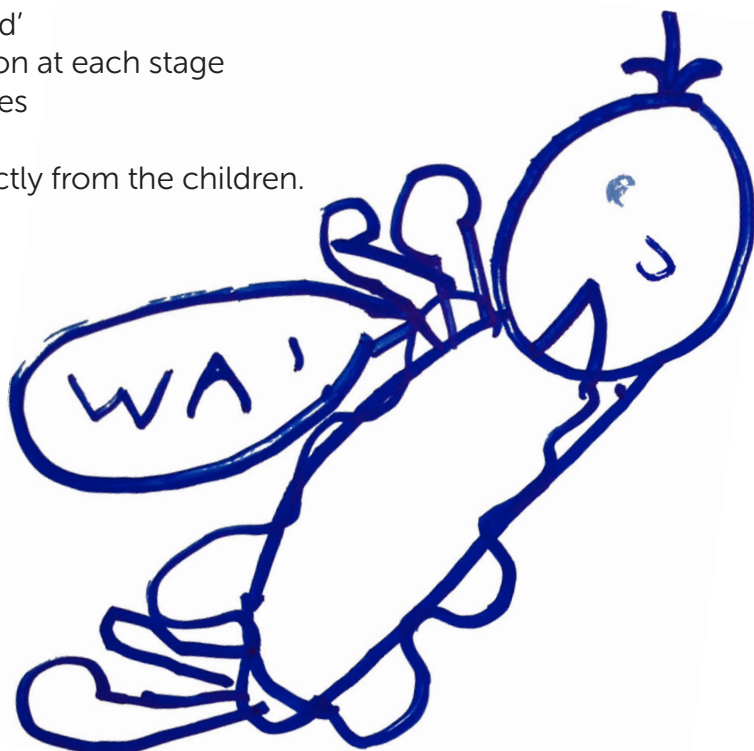
This consultation on the Best Start Grant follows our recent consultation on the Child Poverty Bill and Delivery Plan. One of the recommendations the children made in that report was to provide additional financial support to families who were struggling, so we returned to speak with some of the children who took part in the Child Poverty Consultation, so they could use their previous discussions to inform their ideas for the Best Start Grant.

In the Best Start Grant consultation, workshops involved 43 Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs)¹ between the ages of 8 and 12 years. 21 boys and 22 girls took part. We worked in three schools in the following local authorities: South Lanarkshire, Fife and Scottish Borders. These areas were selected using SIMD data to identify areas where poverty might impact directly or indirectly on children's lives. We sought to work with children from diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities so that a range of views would be reflected in this report.

In the workshops, the children discussed:

- What it means to 'be responsible for a child'
- What the Best Start Grant could be spent on at each stage
- What difference this could make for families

The quotes and artwork in this report come directly from the children.



¹ All children who participate in our projects and consultations become Members of Children's Parliament. Unlike other parliamentary bodies, Children's Parliament is not an elected body. Rather it is a participatory one, engaging with children across a range of settings in order to include as many children as possible.

Background Information:

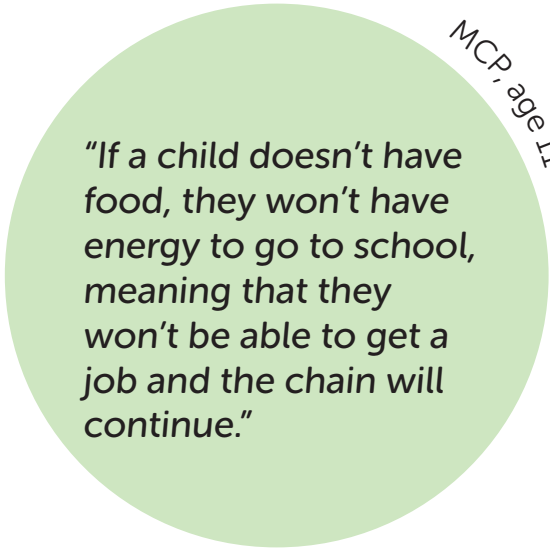
Summary of Child Poverty Report

Children are experts in their own lives and as such Children's Parliament is interested in learning about the experiences that shape children's lives at home, at school and in the community. For roughly one in four children in Scotland, poverty is one of the biggest issues they face. It has a deep and lasting impact on children's development, educational attainment and aspirations. If Scotland is to become the best place for children to grow up, it is essential that all our children have a childhood where they feel healthy, happy and safe and their life course is not limited by poverty.

In early 2018, Children's Parliament facilitated a consultation with 96 children across Scotland about child poverty on behalf of Scottish Government. Below is a summary of what they said.

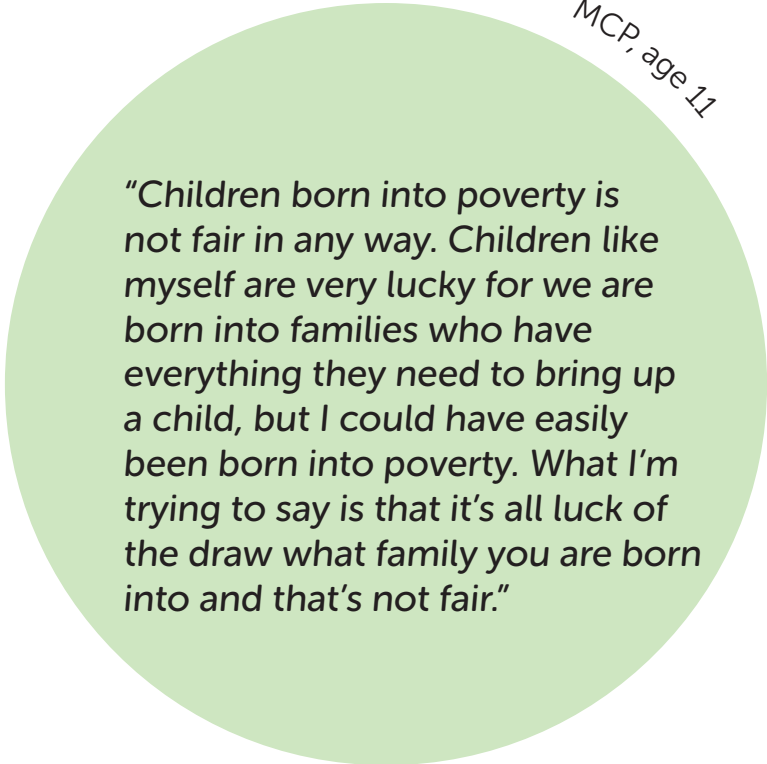
What is child poverty?

To children, 'poverty' means poor people, not having enough money to buy things, and the difference between rich and poor people. Poverty is also one of the things children identify as impacting on their human dignity. Children recognise that poverty is not experienced the same way for all families. There are some children who are born into poverty and it is the reality for that family for generations. For others, it is a temporary experience due to ill health, unemployment or family breakdown, but there is a possibility that the family may overcome these difficult circumstances.



MCP, age 11

"If a child doesn't have food, they won't have energy to go to school, meaning that they won't be able to get a job and the chain will continue."



MCP, age 11

"Children born into poverty is not fair in any way. Children like myself are very lucky for we are born into families who have everything they need to bring up a child, but I could have easily been born into poverty. What I'm trying to say is that it's all luck of the draw what family you are born into and that's not fair."

Recommendations

Children discussed the numerous ways that poverty could be alleviated for families across Scotland, including recommendations for life at home, at school and in the community. Some of their recommendations include:

- More money towards benefits + extra support for single parents
- Create flexible working policies for parents
- Reduce the price of gas, electricity and utility bills
- Build more council / social housing for families
- Help people keep track of what they are spending
- Make activities and clubs free or cheaper
- Reduce cost of school trips and residential
- Provide free / cheaper uniforms for children
- Create a way for children to get cheaper school supplies
- Provide young people with career and higher / further education support
- Give young people more financial support to attend college or university
- Ensure families have access to computers and the internet
- Provide money to communities affected by poverty
- Spend more money on streetlights and cleaning parks
- Provide cheaper public transport for children and families
- Talk with children who are living in poverty and listen to their suggestions!

Final messages

The purpose of this consultation is to bring the voices of children forward to influence how we make real our commitments to improve wellbeing and our ambition to eradicate poverty, particularly for our youngest citizens. Children had these final messages to help guide our next steps in tackling poverty.

For children living in poverty, they can carry a weight on their shoulders. Children recognise how poverty can impact on all areas of life – this weight extends beyond life at home and does not disappear when they are at school or when they move into adulthood.

The experience of poverty has a deep impact upon children's relationships. Children want to have positive relationships with the people in their lives, but they describe how poverty can make developing and maintaining relationships difficult. Children feel that poverty adds another layer of difficulty to their relationships with parents, siblings, friends, teachers and community members.

Children view poverty through a lens of fairness. Children believe that all children should have what they need in order to live and grow up healthy, happy and safe and they do not want anyone's life to be defined by poverty. Children have a deep sense of empathy for people who are struggling and want everyone to be treated with dignity.

Children want to be part of the solution. Children want adults to listen to what they have to say and take their views and ideas seriously. It is essential that adults commit to taking time and creating spaces for children to share their experiences and, once they've heard from children, adults need to use this information to take action.

Caring for Children

Children recognise that adults have responsibilities to make sure children are happy, healthy and safe. By fulfilling their responsibilities, adults respect children's human dignity and uphold children's human rights. Children emphasise the importance of "understanding children and respecting them for who they are."

Who is responsible for looking after a child?

Mum and/or Dad
Grandparents
Guardians / Carers / Foster parents
Adoptive parents
Other relatives



Other people who have caring responsibilities for children:

Social Workers
Child minders / babysitters
Prime Minister or First Minister and other politicians
Lawyers
People who work at care homes or boarding schools
Corporate parents
Police
School teachers
Mediators
Doctors



Responsibilities

Adults who care for children have specific responsibilities as children outline below. These responsibilities are reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and when they are met, children's rights to be happy, healthy and safe are fulfilled.

"Being responsible for a child means giving them a good life."

MCP, age 9

HAPPY

- Love us
- Give us hugs and kisses
- Make sure we are happy
- Help us make friends
- Talk to us about not bullying and care for us if we're being bullied
- Let us play and let friends come over for playtime
- Give us opportunities to try new stuff and encourage us
- Make sure we're educated and help us with our homework
- Take us to after-school and sports clubs
- Buy us toys and give us gifts on our birthday
- Entertain us

**"Singing songs!
My three-year-
old sister always
cheers up when
she is sung to."**

MCP, age 10

SAFE

- Make sure we're safe
- Have a job and get enough money
- Make sure we're ok and comfort us
- Teach us rules and boundaries
- Keep our house clean and safe



HEALTHY

Wash our clothes and teach us how to use the washing machine
Check for allergies
Keep us active
Feed us well
Do the shopping
Take us to the doctor when we aren't well and give us medicine
Take us swimming or to the soft play on weekends
Help us brush our hair
Give us baths and make sure we're clean
Buy us clothes and proper shoes
Change nappies
Toilet training
Put us to bed and have a bedtime routine

"They should give you hugs because it shows that they care for you."

MCP, age 8

HAVING OUR SAY

Listen to us
Pay attention to us
Be trustworthy and supportive
Don't force us to do something we don't want to do
Believe in our passions

Across all of our consultation work, 'fairness' and 'equality' is frequently highlighted as being important to protecting children's dignity:

"Parents should teach children to be equal so that they know that they are all the same."

MCP, age 12

Worries

Children understand that adults who look after children have many responsibilities and that sometimes this can be challenging.

Adults may feel worried, stressed or anxious when raising a child which can impact a child's upbringing, wellbeing and relationships, in turn compromising a child's right to be happy, healthy and safe.

Children recognise that even before a child is born, adults may experience worry about the prospect of raising a child. As their child grows up, adults may worry when they experience something new for the first time (such as their first day of school) or about being unable to protect them if, for example, the child is bullied, gets lost or goes missing. They might feel stressed when trying to keep their child safe all the time. They might worry about making sure their child has a good mental image or positive self-esteem and perhaps, even worry about their own relationship with their children. Parents and carers might feel worried about their child's future and whether they will get a good education or a job.

For parents and carers living in poverty, children highlight that there can be additional worries such as going into debt, not having enough money or being unable to afford everything their child needs.



Payments

What is a grant?

To children, the 'Best Start Grant' is understood to be:

"a grant is giving something to someone"

"it's a wish"

"giving someone a good start in life"

"for very young children"

"a phrase about money"

"a loan you don't pay back."

Considering how the Best Start Grant might be best spent by parents and carers who are entitled to the payment, the children highlighted the following items for each of the **Maternity, Nursery** and **Primary School** payments.

Cot
Buggy
Nappies + wipes
Bib
Blanket
Bottles
Clothes, hats + shoes for the baby
Sling
Highchair
Car seat
Dummy + teething ring
Medicine – calpol, jags
Baby bath + bath toys
Formula / baby food



Toys & teddies
Story books
Corner safeties
Baby gate
Coat + salopettes
Door bouncer
Maternity clothes
Travel to hospital appointments
Car & mobile phone
Nanny / childminder / babysitter
Massage chair
Antenatal help + support

Maternity Payment

Nursery Payment

Clothes
Buggies
Nursery fees or childminder
Sunhats
Balance bike or scooter
Coat

Milk money
Money for trips
Snacks

Toothbrush
Packed lunch
Harness / reins

Wellies + rain coat for playing outside
Pull-up pants

Plasters
Toys, colouring pens/pencils + toys for learning

Sippy cup
Wipes

Lunch box + water bottle
Gym shoes

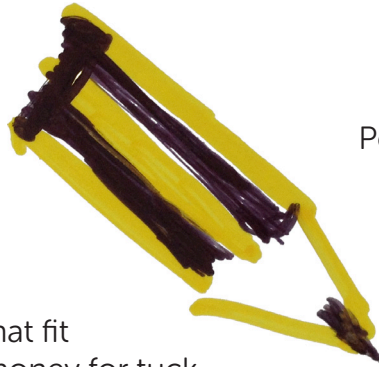
Warm clothes for winter
Nursery uniform (if there is one)

Blanket
Shoes that fit

Umbrella
Food + snacks
A bag for nursery
Books

Toddler bed

Petrol + insurance for the car
Some money for parents



Clothes + shoes that fit
Lunch money + money for tuck
Water bottle

Coat, gloves, scarves, boots + hats

First aid - medication, tablets, inhalers, plasters

Visits to the school to make them comfortable with their new teacher & classmates

PE kit

School uniform

School bag + lunchbox

Umbrella

Money for fun days + school trips

Water bottle

Raincoat

Scooter or bike

Bus fare

Warm clothes

Stationery – rulers, rubbers, pencils, pencil case,
notebooks, markers, glue & safety scissors

Petrol + insurance for the car
Fees for clubs – football, rugby,
gymnastics

Writing lessons
Swimming lessons

A watch
Wellies
Toys

School Payment

When thinking about how the Best Start Grant should be spent, children recognise that the payments might be used for reasons other than the child's upbringing. However, some parents might use the payment for something that indirectly impacts upon their child's upbringing such as paying for a childminder if they plan to be away from the child:



"Parents shouldn't buy cigarettes for example as that's just definitely not helping the child. But they can spend it on themselves a little bit – like for a childminder or babysitter if they want to go out and relax."

MCP, age 11

What difference could the Best Start Grant make?

As highlighted in our recent consultation about child poverty and re-emphasised by children in this consultation, children feel strongly that families who are struggling financially should receive financial support to ensure their children are able to grow up in a happy, healthy and safe environment. To children, the Best Start Grant is a clear example of this. It will **help families' financial situations** and **make it easier for adults to buy things for their children**.

"More children will get a better start in life than they do."

MCP, age 10

"It will be easier for parents who are stressing about this. It will be a weight off their shoulders"

MCP, age 10

Children highlight what differences this grant might make to children and families living in poverty, emphasising how adults and children might feel:

Adults will...

- feel happy because they have money to care for their children
 - feel less pressure to use a lot of money from their job
 - feel proud because their child has what they need
 - know their child is happy and healthy
 - feel like they've been helped a lot
 - not feel nervous for their child
 - feel a lot of relief
 - feel secure

Children will...

- know that someone cares for them
 - feel like they can participate
 - feel more included
 - feel grateful
 - feel happy

Children are enthusiastic about the introduction of the Best Start Grant and feel this will make Scotland a different place for many children growing up across the country. Some children wonder whether this grant may also attract attention from those living outwith Scotland:

"I think a lot more people would move to Scotland."

MCP, age 11



Questions

Children are curious about how the Best Start Grant will work in practice. Below is a list of questions raised by children during the consultations for those involved in the design and delivery of the grant to reflect upon.

Is it just for people who don't have very much money or all families?

How do you choose the people who get it?

When will you get the money?
How long does it take?

How do you apply? Is there a website? Where do you go to apply?

If you have some of the money left over, do you have to pay it back?

What if you have twins or triplets?

What if you aren't poor but you apply?

How many kids can you apply for?
Is there a limit?

What if you don't live with your birth parents?

Are there any downsides?

Is it just for the child?

Is there a certain age group where it stops? What about when they get older?

What if parents take the money and don't spend it on their child?

Is it cash or does it come on a card where you can track what people spend it on?

Couldn't you just give people a box of things they need?

What happens if you apply just after the age limit has passed?

What if you've adopted a child and don't get the application in on time?

What if they get the money then get a new job and don't need it?



Spreading the word

For children and their families to benefit from the Best Start Grant, it is important that the process of applying for the grant is accessible to those who are entitled to it. As experts of their own lives, children are in the best position to reflect upon the ways children and their families obtain and respond to information in their day to day lives. Here, children share their suggestions for ways in which information about the Best Start Grant could be advertised and circulated to reach families across Scotland who are eligible to apply:



school dinners
101

About Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement.

Children's Parliament works for a future where all children in Scotland are actively engaged in shaping our world so that everyone is healthy, happy and safe. We believe all children should live and grow with dignity and be valued for what they can offer the world.

We work creatively through projects, consultations and training programmes to improve communication between children and adults and to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. This enables us to explore our world together. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level. Our interest is in working with children, the adults who love and care for them, and the wider community in which they live in order to support our country to meet its obligations to our youngest citizens.

Children's Parliament uses a rights-based approach and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the foundation for all of our work.

In 2017, Children's Parliament turned 21 years old. To celebrate our birthday, we reviewed our work and published "*What Kind of Scotland?*". This reflective and celebratory report highlights the voices of Scotland's children:

<https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/what-kind-of-scotland/>

