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Scottish Child Payment

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Scottish Child Payment is at the forefront of plans to reduce child poverty. This briefing describes the policy development, looks at early data on take-up and considers its possible impact on child poverty.

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Executive Summary

Scottish Child Payment (SCP) is a key plank in the Scottish Government's strategy to meet its statutory child poverty targets. It was introduced in February 2021 as a £10 per week payment for children under six in low income families.

After its announcement in 2019, the SCP was developed over the course of 18 months, with only a slight delay due to COVID-19. However the speed of development meant compromises in design and the level of consultation held (discussed further below).

Adding the SCP to the social security programme has had an impact on other benefits. The development of some other benefits was delayed; and administrative data also appears to show an impact on processing time for the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.

The SCP is due to be extended to under 16s at the end of 2022 but, as of March 2021, the DWP and Scottish Government had yet to agree about data sharing. Stakeholders have asked for payment to 6 to 16 year olds to be made sooner. The Scottish Government will therefore provide a 'bridging payment' to those children aged 6 to 16 who get free school meals on the basis of low income. The SNP manifesto [1] includes a commitment to double the payment to £20 per week over the course of the Parliament (2021-2026).

These extensions would increase the payment's impact on child poverty. Latest official poverty figures show that relative child poverty was 26% in 2019-20. SPICe modelling suggests that this may have fallen to an estimated 23% in 2021-22, in large part due to the benefit uplifts introduced at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also reflecting the introduction of the SCP. The next official statistics are expected in March 2022.

The 'headline' target is to reduce relative child poverty to 18% by 2023-24 and to 10% by 2030-31. Not all of this is to be achieved by the SCP alone. Once extended to children under 16, Scottish Government modelling suggests that the SCP will reduce child poverty by three percentage points. [2]

Initial take-up in the first month of payments was forecast at 70%. SPICe analysis of administrative data suggests that it may be closer to 60%. The Scottish Government has a range of actions to try to maximise take-up, so it may improve over 2021-22. A new benefit take-up strategy is expected in October.

SPICe analysis suggests that if eligibility was extended to children under 16 and the payment per child was also doubled to £20, then child poverty would be at 19% in 2021 rather than the 24% estimated level of child poverty with no SCP. This would more than achieve the policy intention of a three percentage point reduction on the baseline rate of child poverty, although it remains higher than the interim target level of 18%. However, this assumes that a high level of take-up is achieved (80% for families with children under six and 75% for families with children aged 6-15).

Future SPICe analysis will consider the potential position in 2023. Analysis by JRF has suggested that in 2023-24, based on a £10 payment, the SCP could reduce child poverty by two percentage points, rather than the three percentage points estimated by the Scottish Government in 2019. This difference could be due to updates in the underlying data or difference in the model assumptions, but is within the margin of error given the inherent uncertainty of modelling techniques.[i]

An interim evaluation of SCP will take place this year and be published next year, in 2022. This will inform the next tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, due by the end of March 2022.

i Scottish Government personal communication, 9 July 2021.

What is Scottish Child Payment?

Scottish Child Payment is £10 a week for each eligible child under six years of age. Payments started to be made in February 2021 and are paid every four weeks in arrears to families who get the following qualifying benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

The Scottish Government checks eligibility against data it receives from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Entitlement ends the week after a qualifying benefit stops (Regulation 19, Scottish Child Payment Regulations 2020). Automatic notification from DWP to Social Security Scotland the day after Universal Credit ends is intended to help reduce overpayments that would occur if there was a delay in stopping SCP after a qualifying benefit stopped. [3] If a qualifying benefit is reinstated within 12 weeks of stopping, a claim for SCP can be reopened without the need for a new application.

The Scottish Government plans to extend payments to children under 16 by the end of 2022, subject to data on qualifying benefits being received from the DWP. The SNP manifesto included a commitment to increase the payment to £20 'over the course of this Parliament'. The potential impacts of these extensions are discussed later in this briefing.

In order to claim for a child, the general rule is that they must be named on the applicant's Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Pension Credit or Universal Credit claim. In most situations showing responsibility for a child will be straightforward, but the rules also allow for more complex situations such as kinship care and adoption.

Following the principle in paragraph 55 of the Smith Commission Agreement that new benefits must not be offset by reductions elsewhere, Scottish Child Payment does not count as income in the calculation of any other UK or Scottish Government benefits.

Applications can be made online, by phone or by post. Information on applying is available at: https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-child-payment/how-to-apply Social Security Scotland is also writing to potential applicants inviting them to apply. [4] Guidance giving more detail on how decisions are made is published by Social Security Scotland. [5] This covers issues such as competing claims, kinship care and how to show responsibility for a child.

Trends in child poverty and the statutory targets

Scottish Child Payment has been developed in the context of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 which set several targets to reduce child poverty, as set out in table 1 below. The 'headline' measure is to reduce relative child poverty to 18% by 2023-24 and then to 10% by 2030-31. All poverty measures are after housing costs.

Table 1: Child Poverty Targets

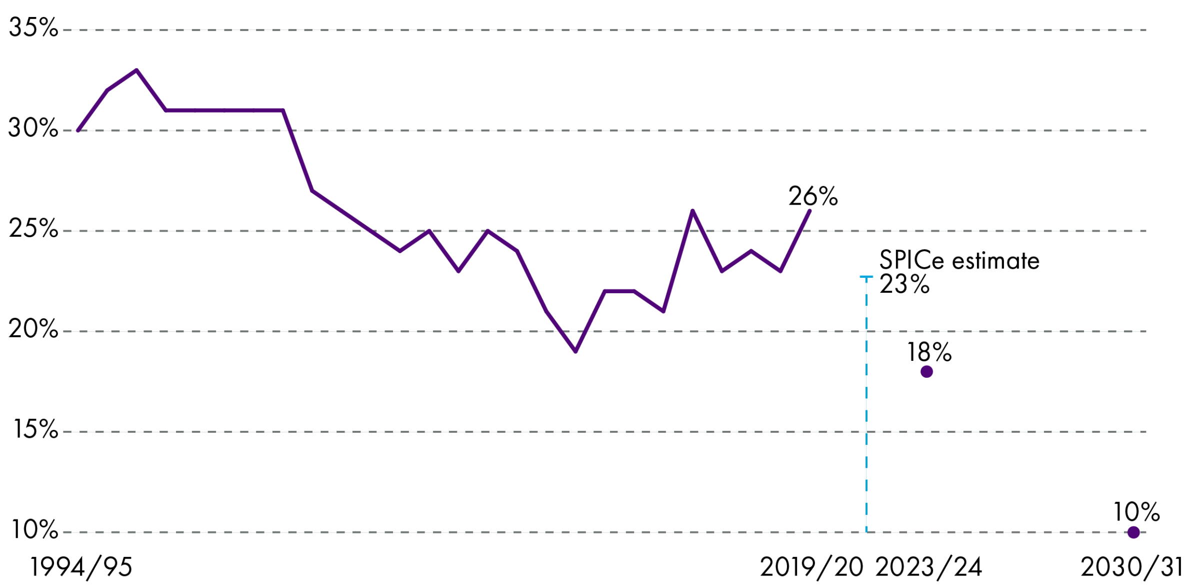
	Latest data: 2019-20	Interim Targets: 2023-24	Targets: 2030-31
Relative poverty	26%	18%	10%
Absolute poverty	23%	14%	5%
Combined low income and material deprivation	12%	8%	5%
Persistent poverty	16%	8%	5%

Child poverty summary, 2021[6] ,Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, 2017[7]

Official statistics show that relative child poverty increased from 19% in 2011-12 to 26% in 2019-20. Modelling by SPICe suggests that the current level (2021) is an estimated 23%. This fall is likely to be due largely to measures introduced in response to COVID-19, such as the uplift to Universal Credit, many of which are temporary, so poverty levels could increase as these measures are withdrawn. The SCP contribution is discussed later in this briefing.

The chart below shows the long-term trend in child poverty and the targets.

Figure 1: Children in relative poverty in Scotland (after housing costs) and targets for reduction



Scottish Government (2021) Child Poverty Update, SPICe calcuations.

Policy Development

In 2018 the Poverty and Inequality Commission advised the Scottish Government on how to achieve the statutory targets for poverty reduction. One of their suggestions was a benefit 'top-up'. While recognising that social security could not deliver the targets on its own, the Commission advised the Scottish Government that:

> " The Delivery Plan should set out the options that the Scottish Government will consider over the period to 2030 to top up or create benefits."
>
> Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2019[8]

The Commission worked with IPPR Scotland to model the impact of topping up specific benefit payments, concluding that:

> " The modelling found that increasing the child element of Universal Credit appears to be the most cost-effective way of reducing child poverty."
>
> Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2019[8]

Consequently, the Child Poverty Delivery Plan in March 2018 proposed an 'income supplement for low income families.' Detailed proposals were published in June 2019. After considering five options the preferred approach was:

- Scottish Child Payment of £10 per week per child
- an application-based benefit for families with children under 16
- qualifying benefits would include Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance and Child Tax Credit.

At the time, Aileen Campbell MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, described Scottish Child Payment as: "one of the most progressive policy proposals put forward since devolution" with the potential to be "transformative." [9]

More precisely, Scottish Government modelling suggested that the payment would reduce child poverty by three percentage points, lifting 30,000 children out of poverty. Later sections of this briefing examine the possible impact in 2021-22.

Intended impact by 2023-24

The objectives of Scottish Child Payment were set out in 2019 [10] and are:

- achieve a minimum reduction in child poverty (relative, after housing costs) of three percentage points when the income supplement is fully rolled out.
- reduce the depth of poverty and provide support to those who need it most.
- help to support a sustainable and lasting reduction in poverty for families with children.

The policy paper published in June 2019 assumed 83% take-up to take 30,000 children out of relative poverty by 2023-24 as set out in the table below:

Table 2: Poverty impacts: payments to children aged 0-16 in 2023-24

	Impact/Cost in 2023-24
Change in children in relative poverty	- 30,000 (- 3 percentage points)
Assumed take-up rate	83%
Children eligible	410,000
Children reached	340,000
% of 0-16s in poverty reached	80%
% of recipients in poverty	45%
Policy cost	£180m

Scottish Government, 2019[10]

Timetable

The initial plan was for introduction by the end of the Parliament:

> " Scottish Child Payment will be made to children under the age of six before the end of this parliamentary term (March 2021); and to all eligible children aged under 16 by the end of 2022"
>
> Scottish Government, 2019[10]

In September 2019, a short-lived accelerated timetable was announced [11] whereby the SCP for children under six would start 'by Christmas 2020' and be extended to children under 16 'by 2022'.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the social security programme being reconfigured. Delivery of SCP was still the priority, but the start date for payments to children under six reverted to 2021. [12]

In the event, the legislation was passed in September 2020, applications opened on 9 November and the first payments to children under six were made at the end of February 2021.

Developing the legislation: policy choices

The desire to introduce the Scottish Child Payment as soon as possible has required various compromises on the policy design and legislative route.

There was no formal public consultation but there was considerable stakeholder involvement in its development. The policy note accompanying the regulations observed:

> " Given the pace at which the SCP is being introduced, consultation on the policy development and the draft Regulations has taken place through face to face engagement with stakeholders and user research activities rather than a formal, written public consultation process."
>
> Scottish Government, 2020[13]

When first proposed in March 2018 it was assumed that primary legislation would be used.

[14] However, the proposal published in June 2019 was to use regulations. [10] It is the first use of the power to 'top-up' reserved benefits under section 79 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.

The Scottish Government recognised at the time that this placed constraints on policy choices but felt that this was outweighed by the ability to deliver the benefit quickly.

> " The legal route we have chosen, while ensuring we can deliver payments early, also places constraints on what we are able to do at this time."
>
> Scottish Child Payment: updated position paper October 2019, 2019[2]

Those choices included not being able to make housing benefit a qualifying benefit and making payments in arrears rather than in advance. In addition, because of the timescales involved, SCP was developed as an application based benefit rather than an automated payment. [2]

Issues raised by stakeholders

Stakeholders supported Scottish Child Payment but queried some of the policy choices made. Issues raised in a scrutiny event held by the Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) [3] and in written submissions to the Social Security Committee [15] included:

- making payments automatic to ensure full take-up
- allowing payments in advance and/or increasing the frequency of payments
- extending to children under 16 sooner than the end of 2022, and if that is not possible allowing those children under six that receive the payment to continue to receive it
- increasing the amount of the payment - both the basic amount and providing a more generous policy on uprating.

JRF and IPPR's 'Making the most of the Scottish child payment' (2019) included 16 recommendations for improvement, including increasing the frequency of payments and 'double-lock' uprating (uprating by the higher of CPI inflation or median earnings growth). However, they also considered that:

> " in terms of cost-effectiveness the proposals for the Payment show high impact for the investment."
>
> Congreve, 2019[16]

Draft regulations and scrutiny by SCoSS

Draft regulations were provided to the Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) in October and December 2019. SCoSS reported in January 2020 with 15 recommendations. These included that the Scottish Government should give further consideration to:

- 'Double lock' uprating. The Scottish Government rejected this noting that: "it could result in an additional cost of £9 million in 2024-25." [17]

- A tapered withdrawal to avoid small increase in earnings resulting in a larger loss of benefit. The Scottish Government recognised there is a case to be made but pointed out the complications of introducing it.
- Automated awards. The Scottish Government rejected this as too complex in the short term but made a commitment to review its feasibility after full roll-out in 2022.

Similar issues were discussed when the draft regulations were considered in the Parliament in September 2020.

In order to cope with the high volume of claims expected, additional draft regulations were needed to allow applications to open in November for payments that would start from February 2021. [18] SCoSS reported on these additions in February 2020 and the Scottish Government responded in September.

Primary legislation needed

Although the Scottish Government had chosen to use regulations because it was quicker, they realised that a bill was needed so that provisions on offences and investigations could be included.

The Social Security and Tribunal Membership (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 27 April 2020 on an expedited timetable. Along with the changes to the 'top-up' powers, the opportunity was taken to introduce some technical amendments to social security law but these do not concern SCP.

There was one evidence session at Stage 1. At Stage 3, a duty was introduced to uprate the SCP annually by inflation. The bill was passed on 29 September and received Royal Assent on 10 November 2020.

The regulations are passed

Scottish Child Payment regulations were discussed by the Social Security Committee on 24 September 2020. Uprating continued to be a key issue of concern, as did the fact that, initially, payments stop at age six. The crucial importance of take-up was discussed and while automated payments were recognised as desirable the Scottish Government were clear that they would be challenging to achieve.

In a letter to the Committee, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, said:

> “ I fully recognise the additional hardship being faced by families as a result of COVID-19 and as such I have prioritised resources to ensure the SCP is launched as soon as practically possible. To that end we have worked at pace to ensure that applications for the SCP will open in November, with first payments from the end of February 2021. This is only two months later than originally planned, despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.”
>
> Letter from Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People to Bob Doris, Convener, Social Security Committee, 2020[19]

Amending regulations were laid in November 2020 to ensure that:

- SCP can continue to be paid even if all of someone’s qualifying benefit is deducted to repay an overpayment
- a family receives the SCP for all their eligible children at the same time, even if they applied at different times.

These regulations were alsoreported on by SCoSS (24 November 2020) and that report responded to by the Scottish Government(26 November).

Since first being raised as a proposal in 2018 the emphasis has been on speedy delivery. The timetable announced in June 2019 (introduction for children under six by March 2021) has been achieved. However, this pace of development has affected policy choices and, arguably, led to additional draft regulations and amendments being required.

Its also had an impact on the delivery of other devolved benefits, discussed at the end of this briefing.

Administration costs

The addition of Scottish Child Payment to the social security programme increased development and administration costs. The ‘Programme Business Case’ estimated that implementation costs would be £31 million over six years, as set out below:

Table 3: Administration and Development Costs for Scottish Child Payment. £m

2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
6	6	7	8	3	2

Scottish Government, 2020[20]

Forecast caseload, expenditure, eligibility and take-up

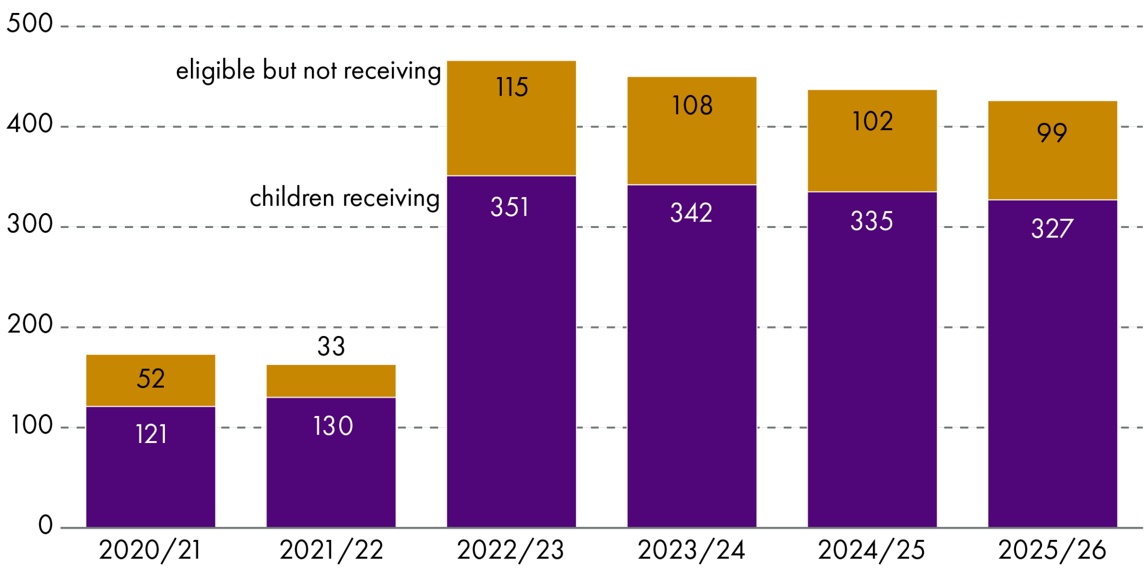
Just prior to its introduction, the Scottish Fiscal Commission (SFC) forecast in January 2021 that around 173,000 children may be eligible for Scottish Child Payment in 2020-21. Of these they forecast that the benefit would likely reach around 121,000 children at a cost of £9 million. The relatively low cost reflects its introduction at the end of the financial year. The SFC forecast a take-up rate of 70% for 2020-21.

As shown in figures 2, 3 and 4 below, eligibility, caseload and expenditure are all expected to increase considerably as the benefit is extended to under 16s. In 2023-24 (when the interim targets must be met), the SFC forecast that 342,000 children would be receiving the payment out of 451,000 eligible at a cost of £184 million. This is a take-up rate of 76%.

The initial options analysis by the Scottish Government had assumed an 83% take-up and that, in 2023-24, 340,000 children would receive the payment (table 2 above). Despite the reduction in the estimated take-up rate, estimates of eligibility have increased, partly driven by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, so the number of children expected to receive the payment in 2023-24 has changed little since the original Scottish Government modelling in 2019.

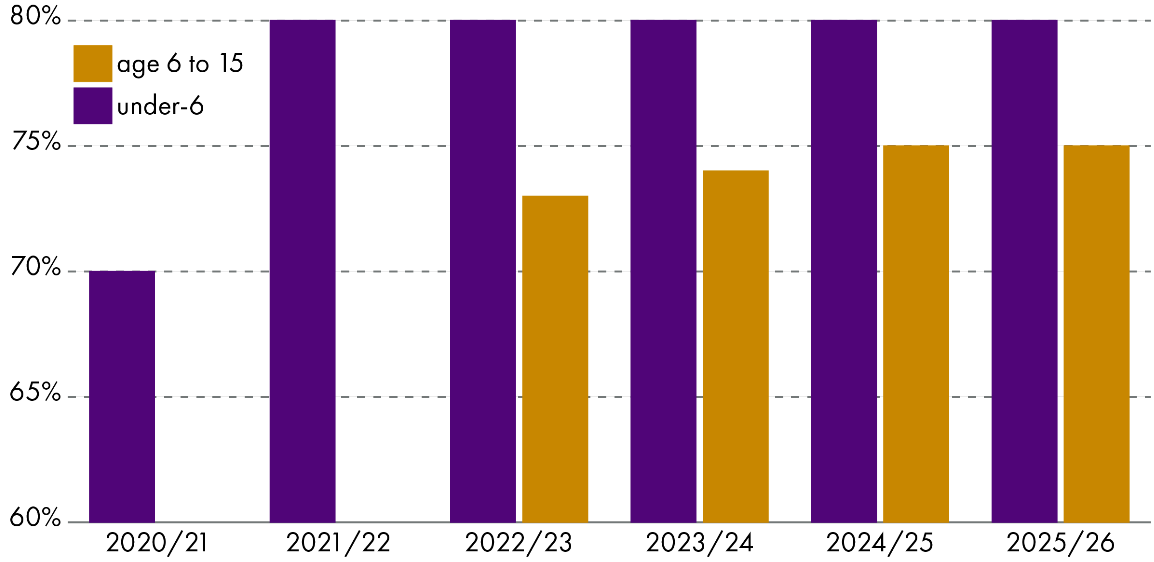
The SFC will produce updated forecasts at the end of August 2021.

Figure 2: Scottish Child Payment forecast eligibility and take-up (000s)



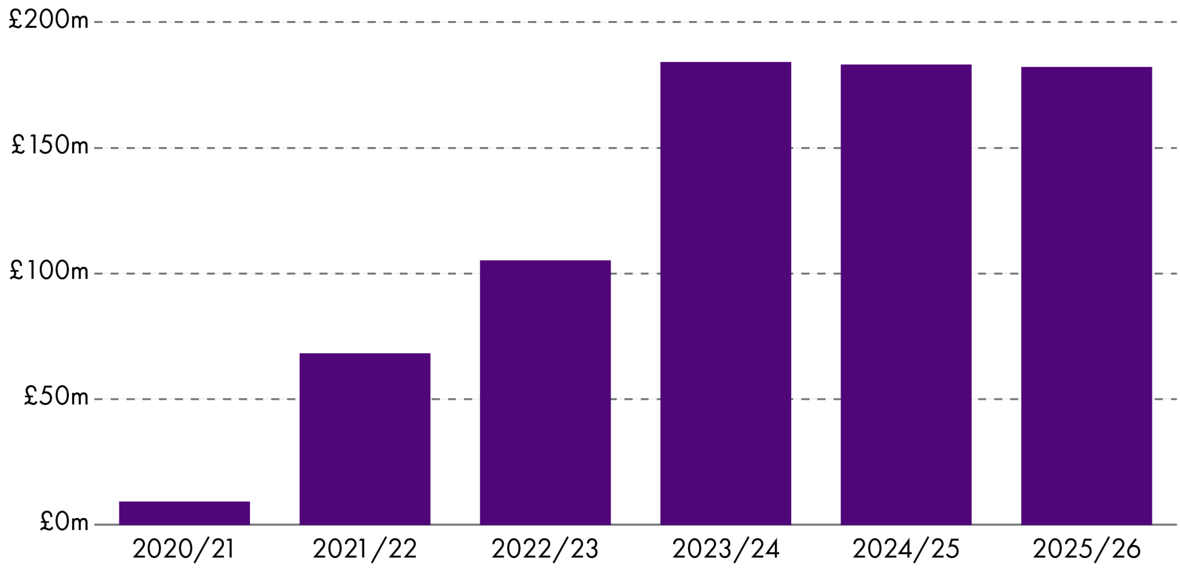
Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts, January 2021

Figure 3: Scottish Child Payment: forecast take-up (%), by age group



Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts, January 2021

Figure 4: Scottish Child Payment forecast spend £m



Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts, January 2021

Initial take-up in 2020-21

Initial data suggests that take-up in 2020-21 may be around 60%. This is lower than the 70% forecast by the SFC.

As noted in the previous section, the SFC had forecast that the SCP would reach around 121,000 children in 2020-21 out of 173,000 eligible.

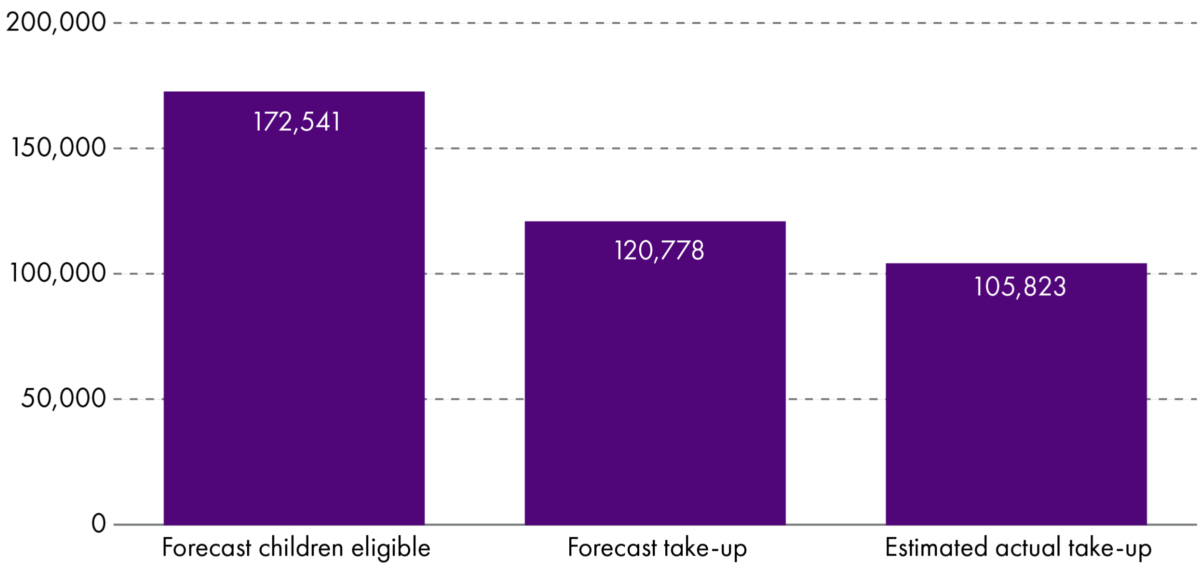
By end March 2021, 60,920 clients had been paid a SCP for a total of 78,775 individual children, clearly much lower than the SFC forecasts. However, by the end of March 2021, only 78% of the 104,345 applications received had been processed. A total of 22,615 applications remained to be processed. To the end of March 2021, the data shows that 92% of applications have been approved. If this rate also applies to the outstanding applications, then a further 20,806 applications might be expected to be approved.

The data for 2020-21 suggest that each application relates, on average, to 1.3 eligible children, so this would equate to an additional 27,048 children receiving payments for 2020-21.

This would bring the total number of children receiving payments in 2020-21 to around 106,000. Based on SFC estimated eligibility of 173,000 this suggests take-up of around 60%.

Data shows there were a further 14,525 applications approved but not paid as at 31 March 2021. These are likely to include a significant number of duplicate applications and so have not been included in these calculations.[ii] As further data on applications and payments become available, a clearer picture on take-up will emerge. The next official statistics are due in August 2021.

Figure 5: Scottish Child Payment: forecast children eligible and estimated initial take-up



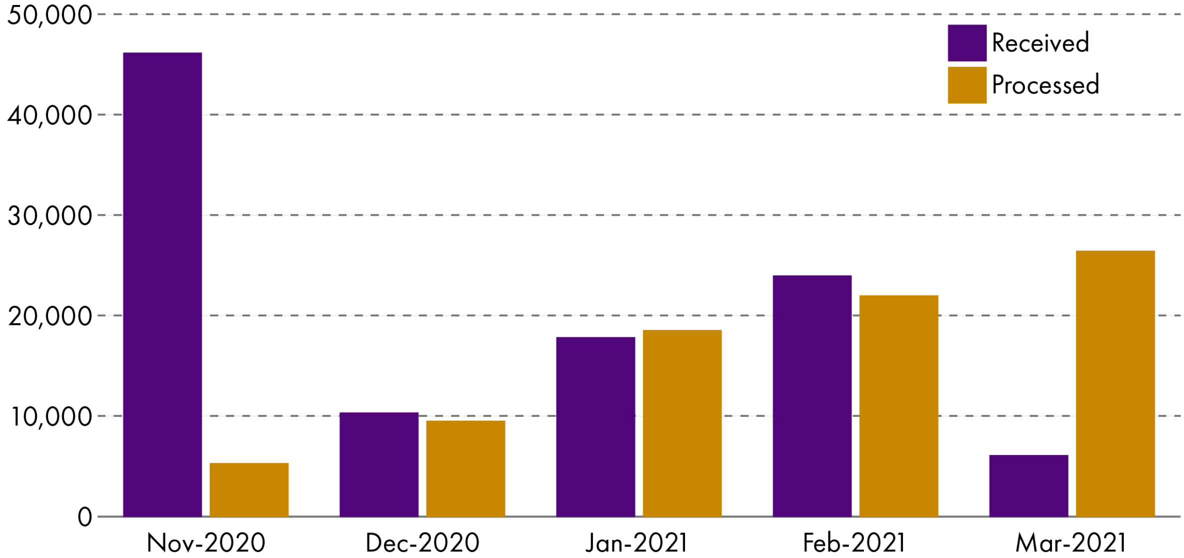
Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts, January 2021, SPICe calculations.

ii Social Security Scotland personal Communication 12 July 2021

Application processing

The early ‘application window’ was designed to manage the large volume of applications expected at the start of a benefit. In total 104,345 applications were received and, by end March 2021, four fifths of these had been processed. The chart shows how processing increased over the five months from November to March, but it still left a 22,615 application backlog at the end of March.

Figure 6: Scottish Child Payment applications received and processed 2020-21



Scottish Government (2021) Scottish Child Payment: high level statistics on applications to 31 March 2021.

To account for this, SPICe calculations for the initial take-up rate have assumed that 92% of the remaining applications will be authorised, which is in line with the rate observed in the initial data.

Maximising take-up

The Scottish Government is working to maximise take-up during 2021-22.

As discussed above, during the development of the SCP, stakeholders suggested that the payment should be an automatic top-up, therefore guaranteeing full take-up. The complexity of doing this meant the SCP has been introduced as an application-based benefit. The Scottish Government is however committed to looking again at automating the payment when they review Scottish Child Payment after 2022. The response to a PQ in February 2021 set out the position:

> “ It would not be feasible to deliver an automated Scottish Child Payment until full roll-out of Universal Credit, which is currently scheduled to be 2024 at the earliest. To deliver an automated payment earlier, we would have had to build interfaces with all the legacy benefits, which would be complex, time-consuming and impossible to deliver within the timescales of the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2022), especially given the already full programme of work to deliver the devolved benefits. We remain committed to automation where possible, and we will review the feasibility again as part of the wider review of Scottish Child Payment after full roll out. However, an automated service would still be complex and require substantial work, as well as a significant level of support from the Department for Work and Pensions. We would be absolutely dependent on the UK Government to provide the necessary data we would need to automate the payment, which is not currently provided.”
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2021[21]

While automation appears unlikely in the short term, the Scottish Government is working to maximise take-up.

A position paper in October 2020 outlined the work being done to maximise take-up of the SCP. This includes:

- writing to everyone eligible for SCP
- allowing SCP to be applied for at the same time as Best Start Foods and Best Start Grant
- a marketing campaign.

The Scottish Government has a benefit take-up strategy. A second strategy is due in October, in which Scottish Child Payment is due to be a central feature. [22]

Work to promote take-up has included using other Scottish 'family' benefits and services to promote the SCP. For example; putting leaflets in the baby box, promoting it through nurseries and schools and signposting through the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods.

The response to a PQ in March 2021 noted that, in addition to launching a “multi-media campaign next month, targeting parents through TV and digital advertising,” work to encourage take-up included:

> “ the promotion of the benefit on commercial radio in November and December, a toolkit of marketing materials distributed through a number of key channels and 18 online Scottish Child Payment Stakeholder Roadshows held in late 2020 attended by over 1,600 individuals representing the third sector and local authorities.”
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2021[22]

Impact on poverty in 2021

The Scottish Government has always been clear that the impact on poverty will not be seen until full implementation. However, it is still useful to consider what impact the SCP might be having now and how changes to the rules might affect its impact. Modelling the current year rather than making forward projections also reduces the number of assumptions that need to be made.

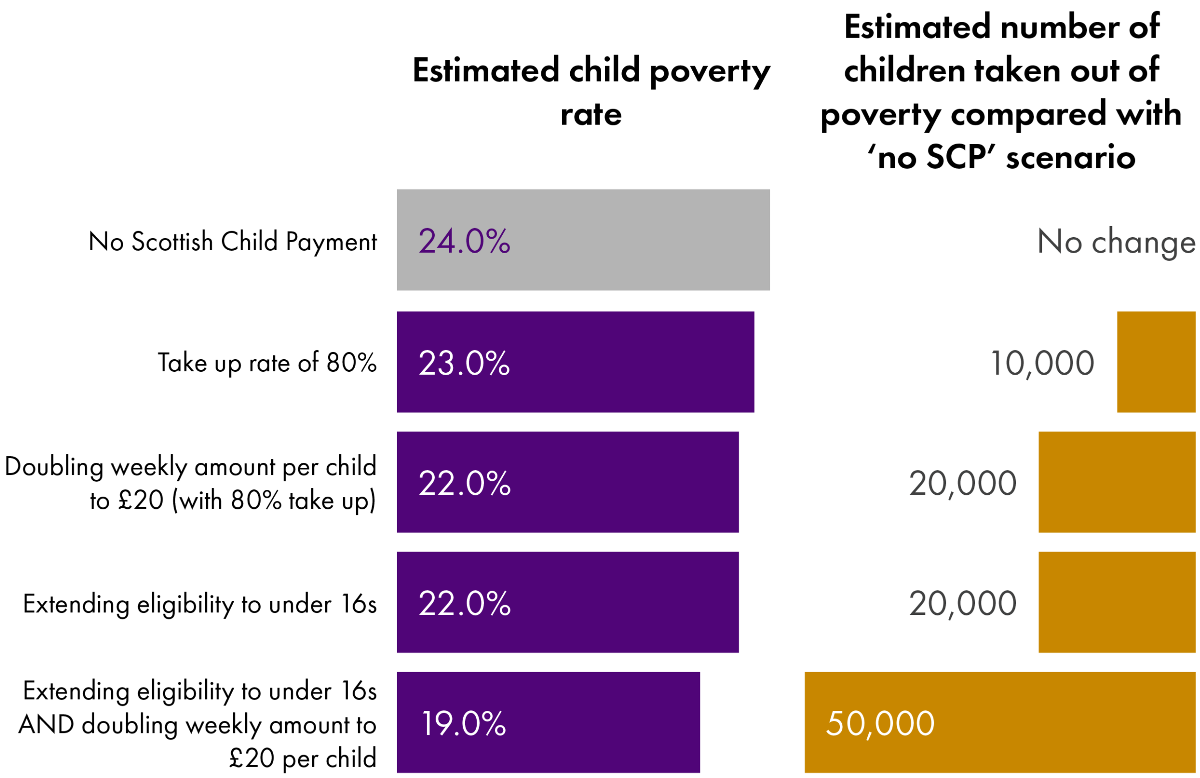
SPICe has looked at:

- the impact on poverty under the current rules - £10 per week to eligible children aged under six
- the impact if that payment was doubled to £20 per week but remained restricted to children under six
- the impact of extending to children under 16
- the impact of doubling the payment and extending to children under 16.

All modelling has been undertaken in the current year (2021). This is for illustrative purposes as it reduces the number of assumptions that need to be made about the state of the economy, earnings and labour market in future years and also any changes to other benefits that might affect SCP.

The following is based on a 'background' poverty rate of 24% in 2021. This is the estimated rate of child poverty that would be seen in 2021 if there was no SCP. As discussed previously, this is lower than the official estimate of 26% in 2019-20, in part due to the introduction of benefit uplifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 7: Impact of alternative SCP policies on child poverty in Scotland, 2021



SPICe modelling using UKMOD

Impact on poverty under current rules

If the SCP had not been introduced in 2021, then SPICe modelling suggests that child poverty would have been 24%, rather than 23%. That is, the SCP has resulted in child poverty being around one percentage point lower in 2021 than it would otherwise have been, which is equivalent to roughly 10,000 fewer children living in relative poverty (after housing costs).

This analysis is based on the assumption of an 80% take-up rate for SCP. As discussed, initial data suggest that actual take-up might be lower than this, but longer-term forecasts, as the policy becomes established, anticipate an 80% take up rate for families with children aged under six.

Modelling of a scenario in which full take-up of SCP was achieved e.g. through automated payments rather than an application system suggests that this would not make a significant impact on child poverty when compared with the high take up scenario (80% take up). [Given the approximate nature of any modelling results, changes that are lower than one percentage point are not reported.]

Impact on poverty of doubling to £20

The SNP manifesto includes a commitment to double the SCP over the course of the Parliament and this has been welcomed by campaigners. [23]

As mentioned, modelling the current year rather than making forward projections reduces the number of assumptions that need to be made. SPICe analysis suggests that doubling the weekly amount of SCP to £20 per child in 2021, while eligibility is restricted to children under six, would result in a further one percentage point reduction in child poverty, which is equivalent to removing a further 10,000 children from poverty.

Again assuming 80% take-up, estimated child poverty in 2021 would fall to 22% compared with an estimated rate of 23% with the current £10 per week payment. The benefit payment costs would double under this policy, with an additional cost of around £68 million per year, based on current eligibility and the Scottish Fiscal Commission's latest forecast of costs for 2021-22.

Impact on poverty if extended to under 16s in 2021

At the end of 2022, the intention is to extend eligibility for SCP to all children aged under 16 in qualifying families. The Scottish Fiscal Commission anticipate that take-up will be lower for families with children aged 6-15, at around 75% (compared to 80% for those with children under 6). (See figure 3 above). This equates to an average take up rate of 77%.

Modelling suggests that, if eligibility was extended to these older children in 2021 (with a £10 per week payment), then child poverty would be reduced to an estimated 22% (compared with 23% under the current eligibility). This would come at an additional cost of around £80 million per year.

In other words it would reduce child poverty by a further one percentage point over and above what is already being achieved.

The Scottish Government has proposed a 'bridging payment' to older children eligible for free school meals (see below). Its possible therefore that some impact on child poverty may be achieved. However, as eligibility for free school meals is more restricted than eligibility for the SCP it is unlikely to have the same impact.

Extending eligibility AND doubling the payment

Modelling suggests that if eligibility was extended to children under 16 and the payment per child was also doubled to £20, then child poverty would be reduced to an estimated 19%, compared with the estimate of 23% with the current policy. This assumes an average take up rate of 77%. The additional annual cost would be around £220 million.

In contrast to the two previous scenarios, the level of take-up under this scenario makes a significant difference to the level of poverty reduction achieved. When both extended eligibility and a higher payment are implemented together then achieving high levels of take-up is important to delivering the desired levels of impact, because a much larger number of children will miss out if take-up is low. Under this scenario (£20 per week payment for each eligible child aged under 16), if a lower average take up of 50% is assumed (rather than 77%), then the estimated child poverty rate achieved is 21% rather than 19%. This two percentage point difference equates to around 20,000 children.

Achieving full implementation: getting the data

The extension to under 16s is dependent on getting the relevant data from the DWP and the Scottish Government has concerns about when it will receive this.

As far back as November 2019, it was clear that there might be an issue with getting the data for older children. Minutes of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare recorded that:

> “ CSSOP (Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People) expressed that she would be grateful for early understanding from DWP on the timescales for receiving data for 6 – 16 years olds for Scottish Child Payment, noting that the SG need this by the end of 2021. DWP noted that UKG already provides the data relating to under 6 year olds as part of Best Start Grant. However, the data sharing for 6-16 year olds is more complex and will require detailed consideration.”
>
> Scottish Government, 2019[24]

In March 2021, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, told the Scottish Affairs Committee that:

> “ We do not have access to the data for Scottish Child Payment phase 2. We are still awaiting information and I think a level of co-operation that is required for me to feel comfortable that the DWP will work with us speedily enough to allow us to deliver on that.”
>
> Scottish Affairs Committee, 2021[25]

The UK Minister told the same Committee that:

> “ for the older children, that data is not readily available. There is never a situation where we will not share data where we can.”
>
> Scottish Affairs Committee, 2021[26]

Andrew Latto (DWP) explained the problem. He distinguished between replacing a DWP benefit and introducing an entirely new benefit. The Best Start Grant replaces (and expands on) the Sure Start Maternity Grant:

> “ what we did was transfer, [..] We moved the data wholesale across so that the Scottish Government could then deliver Best Start grant. […] We do not offer maternity grant in the case of older children, so the data that we have that is being used for the first phase of the Scottish Child Payment does not necessarily exist.”
>
> Scottish Affairs Committee, 2021[26]

There may also be data protection issues. He noted that:

> “ When we take a claim, for example, for universal credit, it doesn’t say anywhere on the form, “Oh, and by the way, we might share your information with the Scottish Government so that you can acquire a different benefit."”
>
> Scottish Affairs Committee, 2021[26]

Other Scottish payments are made without needing data transfers from DWP. Instead, it is up to the claimant to show that they are eligible. Jon Shaw (CPAG) told the Social Security Committee that:

> “ across Scotland, local authorities processing free school meal applications and colleges processing education maintenance allowance payments require people to provide evidence of their entitlement to a qualifying benefit.”
>
> Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee, 2020[15]

The Cabinet Secretary explained that this was not possible for the SCP because:

> “ If we were unable to prove a client’s eligibility for a benefit, we would not be compliant with the “Scottish Public Finance Manual”. It is difficult to see how we could have a Government agency knowingly moving into a position of not being compliant with that manual. […] we have looked at the situation to see whether there is a way round it or something that could be done but, unfortunately, it is our conclusion that there is not.”
>
> Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee, 2020[27]

Its also the case that local authorities have powers to provide free school meals even if the strict qualifying criteria aren’t met and that gives them a bit more flexibility.[iii] For 'top-up' benefits like the SCP, the claimant must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. There may have been more scope for flexibility had the SCP been legislated for as a 'new benefit' rather than a 'top-up.'

Resolving access to data is therefore crucial to the success of Scottish Child Payment, as without extension to older children (and based on a £10 per week payment) SPICe modelling suggests that, child poverty may fall by only one percentage point, even with high take-up rate.

In June 2021, the Scottish Affairs Committee recommended that:

> “ We recommend that Social Security Scotland consider all mechanisms for acquiring their own data where possible if they are requesting data which DWP does not hold. DWP and Social Security Scotland should develop a shared protocol and agreement about data sharing to ensure swifter data sharing on a benefit-by-benefit basis. This protocol should be agreed as soon as possible. This could include a shared DWP-Social Security Scotland data team to examine data and produce information reports. (Paragraph 55)”
>
> Scottish Affairs Committee, 2021[28]

An SNP manifesto commitment to a ‘bridging’ payment to pupils claiming free school meals could capture around half of those entitled to the extended SCP. This proposes a payment of £520, paid in quarterly instalments in 2021 and 2022 to families where children are in receipt of free school meals. Following the manifesto commitment, the most recent report on tackling child poverty notes plans for:

> “ additional payments for children and young people in receipt of Free School Meals, paying £520 in 2021 and 2022 until the Scottish Child Payment is rolled out in full.”
>
> Scottish Government, 2021[29]

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iii Section 53(3) Education (Scotland) Act 1980

In September 2020, the SFC forecast 330,000 children aged 6–16 will be eligible for SCP, [30] and the bridging payment is estimated to reach 'up to 170,000'. [1]

It is difficult to estimate the impact that this bridging payment will have on child poverty. Eligibility for free school meals is more restrictive than eligibility for the SCP. For example, a family on Universal Credit must also have earned income of less than £610 per month to get free school meals but there is no earnings limit for the SCP. Some local authorities operate more generous rules for free school meals which complicates things even further. [31] It is clear that the 'bridging payment' will target children in the lowest income families. However take-up of free school meals declines as children get older. While eligibility rates aren't measured, the fact that 15.6% of secondary school pupils are registered for free school meals compared with 19.9% of P4-7 pupils suggests there is a decline in take-up for older pupils. This reduces its effectiveness as a way to target low income families with secondary school age children. However, feedback from local authorities suggests that take-up of free school meals has improved due to the COVID-19 winter and spring hardship payments that were made to families registered for free school meals.[iv]

iv Scottish Government, personal communication 5 July 2021

Impact in 2023-24

All of the SPICe modelling estimates set out in this paper consider the potential impact in 2021. This suggests that doubling the payment and extending to 16 year olds will achieve the desired poverty reduction of three percentage points. Future SPICe analysis will consider the potential position in 2023, which is the interim target date by which the Scottish Government is aiming to reduce relative child poverty to 18%. Over this period, a number of factors will change with both positive and negative effects on child poverty. For example, the Universal Credit uplift is expected to be removed in September 2021 which would be expected to result in an increase in child poverty, all other things being equal. However, over time other changes to incomes and social security support could act to counteract some of this effect.

Other organisations have also looked at impact to 2023-24. It is important to note that each model will be constructed slightly differently and different assumptions will have been adopted in projecting forwards to 2023-24, so results may not be directly comparable.

In February 2021, JRF considered the impact of a £10 payment and, based on modelling the likely 'background poverty rate' in 2023-24, concluded that:

> “ The Scottish Government is likely to miss their interim child poverty target by four percentage points” [However] The full rollout of Scottish Child Payment (SCP) will make a significant contribution to meeting the interim target and reduce child poverty by around 20,000 or 2% in 2023-24. However, to meet the target purely through SCP would require the payment to be significantly higher.”
>
> Birt, 2021[32]

Modelling from the Fraser of Allander Institute suggests that the interim target of 18% can be met if the SCP is increased to £40. [33]

It was never the intention to meet the interim targets solely through the SCP, and JRF do not recommend this, saying:

> “ simply using social security to meet these targets is not the most sustainable or effective way to do so. We believe that good work and good affordable housing can vastly improve people’s incomes and quality of life, and complement an adequate social security system.”
>
> Birt, 2021[32]

Evaluation plans

Under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Scottish Government must publish child poverty delivery plans for:

- 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2022
- 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2026
- 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2031,

They must report on these plans annually describing the measures taken and:

- the effect of those measures on progress towards meeting the child poverty targets, and, if there is a lack of progress
- describe how the Scottish Ministers propose to ensure sufficient progress is delivered in the future.

The most recent report was published in June 2021 [29] and covers the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment. This noted plans to double the payment by the end of the Parliamentary session and to provide a bridging payment to 6 to 16 year olds.

There will be an interim evaluation of Scottish Child Payment this year, with findings published in 2022. This will inform the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan due by the end of March 2022. In its response to SCoSS, the Scottish Government has said:

> “ We are considering when an evaluation of the SCP is best undertaken. We will begin monitoring the Payment from the initial delivery date by ensuring that appropriate data is collected. We will only be able to evaluate whether the policy has met its stated objectives including the impact on child poverty, when the SCP is fully rolled out. This is because the objectives have been designed for the full policy and not the early introduction of the Payment to under 6s. Nonetheless, acknowledging how important it is to monitor the policy we will start estimating the actual take-up of Scottish Child Payment once data on volume of payments become available from Social Security Scotland. In addition, we are exploring the possibility of evaluating the experience of recipients by undertaking small qualitative research with Scottish Child Payment recipients working together with the Clients Insights team in Social Security Scotland. We will work out the details and timelines of the survey in the coming months. We have already committed to reviewing the Scottish Child Payment during the course of the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2022-2026) and will continue to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that support is targeted on those families that need it most”
>
> Scottish Government, 2020[17]

The Scottish Government has said [17] that issues for review will include:

- the most appropriate legislative route
- the feasibility for automated payments
- frequency of payments.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission also have a key role to play. Their statutory functions include:

- to advise the Scottish Ministers on any matter relating to poverty or inequality in Scotland, including the impact of their policies and use of resources in reducing such poverty and inequality
- to monitor progress in reducing poverty and inequality in Scotland.

Their work includes preparing an annual scrutiny reportwhich looks at the progress the Scottish Government is making in reducing poverty and inequality and identifies where more action is needed. Their latest report [34] included recommendations to:

- increase the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per week this year
- look at whether further increases to the Scottish Child Payment will be needed in order to meet the targets.

Impact on other benefits

The introduction of Scottish Child Payment led to delays to the overall devolution programme and may have slowed down processing times for other benefits.

Delay to the programme

In order to accommodate Scottish Child Payment, the delivery of other devolved benefits was delayed. The response to a PQ in June 2019 explained that:

> " The introduction of Disability Assistance for Older People will now move into 2021 rather than winter 2020, and it is likely that Scottish Carer's Allowance will be introduced in early 2022 rather than at the end of 2021. In addition, the transfer of cases from DWP to Social Security Scotland is now likely to take until 2025."
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2019[35]

The original and revised timetables are set out below, along with the current position:

Table 5: Changing Scottish Social Security Delivery Timetable

	Announced February 2019	Revised June 2019 due to SCP	Revised April and November 2020 due to COVID-19
Best Start Foods	Summer 2019	No change	Started August 2019
Funeral Support Payment	Summer 2019	No change	Started September 2019
Young Carer Grant	Autumn 2019	No change	Started October 2019
Job Start Payment	As soon as practicable	No change	Started August 2020
Child Winter Heating Assistance	By end 2020	No change	Started November 2020
Child Disability Payment (child DLA)	Summer 2020	No change	Pilot July 2021, roll-out November 2021
Disability Assistance for Older People (Attendance Allowance)	By end 2020	By 2021	No date
Disability Assistance for Working Age People (PIP)	Early 2021	No change	Pilot spring 2022, roll-out summer 2022
Additional payment to carers looking after more than one disabled child	Early 2021	No change	No date
Carer's Assistance (Carer's Allowance)	By end 2021	Early 2022	No date
Cold spell heating assistance (Cold weather payments)	By end 2021	No change	No date
Winter Heating Assistance (Winter Fuel Payment)	By end 2021	No change	No date
Industrial injuries disablement benefits	Autumn 2022	No change	No date
Transfer of existing cases from DWP to Social Security Scotland	Expected to be complete in 2024	Expected to be complete in 2025	Expected to be complete in 2025

Scottish Parliament, 2019[35] ,Scottish Parliament, 2020[36]

As shown in the table, COVID-19 has since led to further delays to the programme, but delivering Scottish Child Payment was a priority:

> " Members can be assured that we will do everything that is humanly possible to deliver the payment as soon as that is practically achievable. There is a resolute determination from me, and from everyone who has worked so hard and at such pace, to make it happen at the earliest opportunity."
>
> Scottish Parliament, 2020[12]

Processing time

Official statistics suggest that the introduction of the SCP led to increased processing times for applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. The statistics for February 2021 note that:

> " The increases in processing times observed in December, January, and February are attributable in part to Scottish Child Payment opening for applications in November 2020, with operational resource being diverted to process these applications."
>
> Scottish Government, 2021[37]

The chart below shows average processing times slowing down in summer 2020 (most likely an impact of COVID-19) and again in winter 2020 (partly due to SCP).

Figure 8: Average processing time (days) for Best Start Grant/Best Start Foods. December 2018 to February 2021

Scottish Government (2021) Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods high level statistics to 28 February 2021

Annex A: Modelling assumptions

The SPICe modelling set out in this briefing was undertaken using UKMOD, a microsimulation model developed and maintained by the Centre for Microsimulation and Policy Analysis (CeMPA) at the University of Essex. UKMOD uses data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) combined with tax and benefit policy rules to allow for simulation of the effect of policy changes on households.

The analysis in this briefing uses the Scottish policy system within UKMOD. Using only Scottish FRS data reduces the sample size, so a pooled dataset is used. This combines three years of FRS data (2016/17 to 2018/19) in order to increase the robustness of results. Reflecting the inherent element of uncertainty in modelling results, especially with small sample sizes, all results have been rounded to the nearest percentage point, or to nearest 10,000 where numbers of children are involved.

All poverty measures presented relate to relative poverty measured after housing costs. Relative poverty is defined as those living in households where equivalised net household income is below 60% of the median. As the analysis in this briefing has been undertaken in the Scottish policy system within UKMOD, this also means that the poverty calculations will be based on a poverty line calculated on the basis of Scottish median household income. This means that the results will not be directly comparable with results published by the Scottish Government, which are based on a UK median. Previous SPICe analysis suggests that this should not have a significant effect on the broad conclusions, particularly since results have been rounded to reflect inherent modelling uncertainties. However, more detailed analysis is planned to investigate this issue further. For 2019, the latest year for which the Scottish Government has published child poverty statistics, UKMOD calculates the same child poverty rate as the Scottish Government (26%).

The most recent FRS data are for 2018-19, so will not reflect any of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To adjust for this, UKMOD allows for a range of COVID-19 scenarios to be incorporated. This means that alternative assumptions are applied in relation to labour market conditions and incomes. This analysis uses the central COVID-19 scenario within the UKMOD system. Further details on the assumptions underpinning this scenario can be found in the latest country report. The uplifts to certain benefits and schemes such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme are built into the systems for the relevant years. For 2021, uplifts to Universal Credit and other COVID-19 benefit changes are assumed to remain in place until September 2021, in line with current UK Government policy.

UKMOD simulates the gradual roll out of Universal Credit by assuming a set proportion of claimants of legacy benefits will be in receipt of Universal Credit in a given year. This proportion increases over time. In 2021, it is assumed that 66% of claimants of legacy benefits will be in receipt of Universal Credit.

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