



**Scottish Government's Consultation on the Job Grant  
One Parent Families Scotland Submission**

**April 2019**

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## One Parent Families Scotland

OPFS is Scotland's national single parent organisation. We provide expert information, advice & family support, along with training activities, employability programmes & flexible childcare, tailored to the needs of single parent families. Over 7,500 families received support from OPFS services in 2018.

OPFS model of transformational change has participation at its centre through the active involvement of single parents as volunteers, peer mentors and as members of the board. Our approach enables single parents, the majority of whom are women, to build self-esteem, confidence and skills, increasing parent's access to employment, training and education.

## Single Parent Families

One quarter of Scottish families are single parent households. The Poverty and Inequality Commission, whose main role is to provide independent advice to Scottish Ministers on reducing poverty and inequality, has highlighted that 37% of all children in Scotland living in poverty live in a single parent family<sup>1</sup> and 94% of these single parents are women.

Furthermore, the most current government statistics show astonishingly that **49% of children in single parent families now live below the poverty line.**<sup>2</sup> A recent EHRC<sup>3</sup> report highlights that by 2021 single parents and their children will lose a fifth of their income due to welfare reform - an average of £5,250 a year. The **predicted increase in the child poverty rate (after housing costs) for children in single parent households to over 62%** will have a devastating impact on the lives and prospects of so many children.

## Young Single Parents

OPFS is very pleased to submit evidence to the Scottish Government consultation on the proposed new **Job Grant**. We recognise that for many families headed by a young single mother poverty is the key issue particularly in the context of punitive UK welfare reform. Around 24,000 single parents under 25yrs in Scotland may lose around £780 per year as a result of reductions in the level of their personal allowances. This is because under Universal Credit single parents under 25yrs will receive the same rate of allowance as someone under 25yrs without any children.

Single parent employment is at a record high: nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) of single parents are in work. However most young single mothers have young children. Single parent employment drops when children are young and childcare costs are highest: 52% of single parents with a child aged 0-2 and 48% of those with a child aged 3-4 are not in paid work, compared with 28% of those with a child aged between 5-10.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-Final-Version-23-February-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201617>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf> p153

<sup>4</sup> Gregg, P. and Finch, D. (2016) Employing new tactics: the changing distribution of work across British households. Resolution Foundation.

# Scottish Government's Consultation on the Job Grant

## Background

A new Job Grant<sup>5</sup>, which will provide support to young people with the costs of starting work, is being introduced by the Scottish Government. They have consulted on the key eligibility criteria and format of the grant, which will be delivered by Social Security Scotland to support young people moving back into employment. The grant will be paid to 16-24-year olds (up to 26 years old for care leavers) who have been in receipt of a qualifying benefit specified by the Scottish Government.

To be eligible, most young people will have to have been out of paid work for 6 months before they receive an offer of employment. Job Grant will consist of a one-off cash payment of either £250 or £400, the higher amount being payable to young people who have children. The Job Grant aims to help meet the initial costs of starting work and support a smooth transition into employment for young people on low incomes.

OPFS has organised workshops to enable young single parents to give feedback on their experiences of the UK social security system and their views on the new Job Grant. OPFS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation which includes the following key messages:

## Key messages

- OPFS welcomes that the delivery of Job Grant will be evaluated to ensure that it is reaching young people who may face barriers to gaining employment and need additional support when moving into work.
- Young parents hope the grant would be straightforward to claim. They felt it was a really positive move by Scottish Government and would help change the mindset of young people – that government was supporting young people rather than criticising or tacking a punitive approach.
- On-line claims by young people should be followed up by a text to say the claim is received .
- A longer claim period after starting employment to ensure the job is sustainable around childcare .
- An appeal system should be in place that is robust and gives young people the right of full appeal.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-job-grant/>

## Consultation Paper Questions

### Question 1: Are the eligibility criteria for the Job Grant clear?

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No

Section 5 of the consultation document describes the eligibility criteria for the Job Grant. Our key concerns relate to:

- It is not clear who claims and receives the payment. If a vulnerable young woman is part of a couple where coercive control is an issue, then this may result in financial abuse. Often bank accounts are joint or in the partners name. Also claims are made jointly and details of claimant would be needed to prove entitlement to benefit so an abusive partner would still have control.
- Universal Credit has a 5-week initial assessment period, this means if receipt of UC is the qualifying benefit then payment of the Job Grant will be delayed just at the time when the young parent needs it most. This is particularly the case for young parents many of whom will be on Income Support when applying for a job as so badly impacted by the negative aspects of UC.
- Six months on a qualifying benefit is a long time. This time span will particularly affect young people who take a job, lose it (which can be for many understandable reasons) and then have to reclaim benefit.  
One suggestion would be to change the criteria to 6 mths over a 12-month period and therefore not just prior to the job offer. This would prevent a loss of eligibility due to a break in benefit claim. Account could also be taking of linking periods over a year and information could be sourced from DWP over a longer period.
- UC qualifying descriptor- 'on UC unless in paid employment': consideration may need to be given to the fact that a young person may be in paid work and it's less than 16 hrs on NMW and may face in-work conditionality – to take another job.
- We would like to see an appeal process put in place as is available to claimants of other social security benefits

### Question 2: We have proposed applications for Job Grant can be made 14 days in advance of the employment start date and up to 14 days after employment has commenced. Do you think that the proposed application period for Job Grant is suitable?

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No

### Question 3: If no, please provide comments

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We feel that thought should be given to how the short application window may impact on the need to show that the job offer meets the stated eligibility criteria and the time to apply after starting a job.

On many occasions we have found that when parents have been offered a job it can involve an immediate start, meaning 14 days is a short window. Jobs can include an induction or training period

before the employment is finally confirmed especially for young people. The 14-day period after the job starts is not sufficient time to allow someone to decide if the job is right for them especially around childcare. There is a possibility that the young person will jump to claim the payment then find they can't sustain the employment due to childcare problems.

While this would give them a payment at the time it will result in them having insufficient support when they then get employment which is sustainable. A longer claim period would allow the person time to ensure this particular employment would be sustainable.

When someone starts employment, their hours can be varied for example arranging work patterns around childcare. A longer period of claim to match the establishment of working hours would be advantages to young single parents who are trying to arrange childcare.

If the aim is to enable young people, in this case parents, to be able to receive the Job Grant as early as possible in the job start process, then consideration needs to be given as to how they make available proof of expected hours, which make be very difficult in the application period. Young parents we consulted in Lanarkshire felt 28 days after employment commenced or up to when first wage is paid, would be more reasonable.

*"28 days after starting a job would be more realistic. It would give a single mum time to arrange childcare, time to be PVG'd if needed and a few weeks before knowing if the job is a realistic one."*

*"A longer claim period would prevent debt building up."*

**Question 4: We have proposed that Job Grant consists of one payment of £250, or £400 for young people with children. Do you agree with the proposed format of the payment?**

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There was a mixed response from parents consulted.

**Question 5: If no, please provide comments**

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Some felt a lump sum would be useful as it could help with upfront childcare costs or the first childcare payment (caused by UC payment delay) or to pay their rent. Others felt 2/3 smaller payments would be best as they felt they had poor budgeting skills. Many of the parents felt the need for budgeting support which is a by-product of the discussion which OPFS staff will follow up.

Some thought that if they could split the payments into up to three payments they could draw down amounts as they needed them up to the full amount. This would give flexibility to use the money when they needed it and at amounts they would decide.

**Question 6: Do you agree that the proposals for Job Grant set out in this consultation paper meet the policy intent to support a smooth transition into employment for young people on low incomes by helping to meet the initial costs of starting work?**

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Yes, but see below.

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**Question 7: If no, please provide details**

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As we understand it, from the consultation document the Job Grant will comprise of a one-off cash payment. OPFS very much supports the aims of the Job Grant to help meet the initial costs of starting work, including help towards travel to work, supporting a smooth transition into employment for young people on low incomes. We would wish to suggest that there are certain groups of young people who face more considerable barriers and challenges to gaining and **sustaining** paid work - young single mothers; disabled young people and young care leavers for example.

We wonder if consideration could be given to allowing certain groups of young people to be able to make a repeat application rather than restricting it to a 'one-off' payment. Young Single Mothers face many barriers related to moving into and sustaining paid work, not least the fact that there is a shortage of affordable, flexible childcare for young children in particular and they do not always experience an easy path into sustainable work. The option to be able to claim a Job Grant on more than one occasion could make an important contribution to supporting young single mothers into sustainable employment thus contributing to reducing child poverty.

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**Question 8: Can you identify any potential unintended consequences which we have not considered in these proposals?**

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Yes

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**Question 9: If yes, please provide details.**

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It would be important to reassure young single mothers that when in claiming the job grant it will not impact on or reduce other benefit entitlements. If the grant is used to cover costs that have resulted in the failings in other parts of the social security system (both UK & Scottish) parents should be made aware of their rights to have these costs covered by the benefits originally intended to cover them. For example, where young parents are moving on to Universal Credit for the first time after starting work and are waiting 5 weeks for their first payment.

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**Question 10: Are you aware of any impacts on groups who share protected characteristics we have not identified here?**

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Yes

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**Question 11: If yes, please provide details**

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The majority of young single parents are women. The fact that young mothers under 25 yrs receive less UC than those over 25yrs mean as a group they will greatly benefit from any proactive policies to support young people.

## Reaching Single Parents

In consultations with young single mothers we realise that the changes in the Social Security landscape will have a big impact on their everyday lives. Aside from the devastating impact of Westminster cuts to benefits and the introduction of Universal Credit young parents have very little knowledge of what benefits are being devolved.

We predict OPFS will receive an increase in enquiries around the new Job Grant as well as the other benefits as they are implemented. The changes have the potential to cause confusion and we would wish to support any moves to avoid increasing the complexity of the system. We are also keen to ensure single parents can access support with online access and digital skills to ensure they do not lose out on their entitlements.

OPFS welcomes the commitment that the Scottish Social Security Agency will treat those who use the service with dignity, respect and fairness. We look forward to working SSS to ensure single parents, especially young parents who often feel stigmatised and 'judged' will always be treated with dignity and respect and that the agency will meet the expectations of the Social Security Charter.

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