

PE1683/D

TAMBA submission of 24 May 2018

Background

Whilst families with twins, triplets or more only make up 1.5% of all pregnancies in Scotland, they have a higher risk of stillbirth and neonatal death and nearly two thirds are born prematurely. Surviving babies have six times the risk of developing cerebral palsy and are at increased risk of behavioural and developmental problems throughout childhood.

55% of our families already have one or more children and for the vast majority of families, having twins, triplets or more is not a lifestyle choice. Less than 20% are as a result of IVF and this is dropping dramatically as new restrictive fertility regulations take hold.

Because of the difficult journey to parenthood for many and the hard work of raising more than one baby at a time, 20% of multiple birth mothers suffer from Postnatal Depression (compared to 10% of singletons). The most common factors in PND are extreme tiredness and isolation. 60% of our mothers reported in the first six months they struggled to leave the house and often only had 1-2 hours contact a day with another adult.

A similar proportion of multiple birth children live in 'poor' households as other families. However a higher number of families with twins more generally have lower average incomes, sit just above the poverty level, experience greater financial distress, are more likely to be behind on their bill payments, and their children are more likely to go without.

Our families are more likely to have a parent in work but are far less likely to have both parents working. This means they are less able to work their way out of poverty. This appears to be as a result of the costs and availability of childcare, which deters many mothers from returning to work. Unlike other families the costs of childcare cannot be spread across a number of years.

Parents in these families are also more likely to experience relationship breakdown. Financial difficulties can be a contributory factor. Not only do these families go without, but the children miss life opportunities, while many mothers report their absence from the work place undermines their careers and they never recover.

The committee and the Government have an opportunity to consider introducing measures to make Scotland the most progressive country in the world when it comes to meeting the needs of these families. The practical requirements for doing this are limited both in terms of the policy change required and the costs of implementing the following recommendations. It is also a good opportunity for the Government to test its powers in amending social security benefits, and the ability of the new Social Security Directorate to practice what is practically required to do this for a relatively small but significant group.

Healthcare

Antenatal and neonatal care

Tamba welcomed the Government's 5 year plan for maternity and neonatal care and are actively working to see the key elements for our families enacted. This includes organising a national conference later this year to encourage hospitals from across the country to share best practice and agree how to drive further improvements. We are particularly grateful for the Government's financial and practical support for this event.

Nevertheless, there are further developments that the Government should support to ensure that the higher risks in these pregnancy are addressed going forward.

Recommendations:

- The guidance for delivering antenatal and intrapartum care for twin and triplet pregnancies currently being update by NICE should be fast tracked for adoption once published.
- Ongoing monitoring and support needs to be provided to enable neonatal networks to drive down the number of families who have their babies split across separate neonatal networks due to capacity shortages.
- The Government should look to support Tamba (a) closing the gap with regard to preparing families during the antenatal period for the journey ahead and empowering them with the choices and options they face (b) in providing ongoing support to maternity units trying to improve their practice via audit, peer support and CPD opportunities

Post Natal Depression and support in the home

The Universal Health Visiting Pathway is an effective tool for ensuring support is given to many of the families often with the greatest needs. Furthermore, Tamba continues to help support families in the early days, months and years by providing peer support opportunities via a network of local clubs.

Recommendations:

- When the universal health visiting pathway is updated, it would benefit greatly from explicitly highlighting the additional challenges that twin and triplet families face along with listing background documents that provide further evidence.
- The Government should look to support Tamba's efforts in providing a countrywide twins club network for parents and carers of twins, triplets and more to benefit from the peer support and expertise they provide.

Finances, Leave and Childcare

Universal Credit

We noted the Scottish Government's opposition to restricting Universal Credit to the first two children in each family. It should be noted that the UK Government have acknowledged the additional costs of having twins, triplets and more and that the

vast majority of families do not plan to have more than one baby at a time by [making them an exception to the cap](#).

However, we do share the general concerns about the potential impact of this policy.

Recommendation:

- a) We recommend that the Scottish Government commit to undertaking an early review of the impact of this policy on all eligible families in Scotland as soon as is practically possible.

Child Benefit

It is within the powers of the Scottish Government to top up child benefit. At the moment, families who have first born twins receive £20.70 for the first twin and then £13.70 for the second twin. If twins, triplets or more are born as a subsequent birth they all receive the £13.70 rate. It has long been established that this differential is at odds with the original policy aims for child benefit and fails to acknowledge the additional costs and pressures that all multiple birth families face.

[Irish Model of Child Benefits for twins, triplets and Higher Order Multiples](#)

The committee raised the Irish Government's child benefit model which acknowledges the additional costs and complexity of twins, triplets and more. Their Government pay child benefit for all twins at one and half times the normal rate and twice the rate for triplets or more. Of 65,869 births in Ireland (2015), 2,390 of them were twin births and 95 were triplets or higher-order multiple births.

Recommendations (a) Or (b)

- a) Tamba proposes that the Government uses the powers at its disposal to address this unfairness and seeks to support these families by paying all twins, triplets or more at the higher rate of £20.70. Of the 54,488 births in Scotland (2016), only 804 were sets of twins and 11 triplets or higher order multiples. This would involve the Social Security Directorate processing on average 16 new child benefit applications from these families per week. For all parents of new born twins or more to receive the higher rate for their children of £20.70 is estimated to cost of around £877k per year* whilst the positive impact on our families would be significant.
- b) Or the Government looks to introduce the Irish model, which looks to be potentially more generous and helpful to our families.

Best Start Grant

We welcome the proposal to introduce a [Best Start Grant](#) and the additional provisions that mean that in the case of twins they both receive £600 for set up costs. We will be responding via the formal consultation process but would like to place on record the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- We strongly support the eligibility test for our families to be in receipt of child benefits.

- We support the new set up costs for first born twins averaging £600 per child. This is in line with the set up costs for a singleton first born. Therefore in the case of first born triplets, the cumulative amount should be raised to £1,800. As it currently stands, the average amount drops to £500 per child and it is difficult to understand the logic behind this. Set up costs for hard goods (e.g. triplet buggy, three cots, baby bouncers etc.) is multiplied and economies of scale do not exist.

Nursery and Early Learning Grant and School Age Grant

We welcome the early proposals outlined although it is currently unclear if there is due to be a multiple birth supplement.

Recommendation:

- Future proposals for these grants to be paid further along the parenting journey should consider a multi birth supplement in line with the proposals set out in the best start grant

Best start foods

Again, the policy aims of the best start foods payment are admirable. The proposals to increase payments to £4.25 per week, per child, up to when that child turns three and for entitlement to begin from confirmation of the pregnancy are welcome. Furthermore, providing two vouchers for babies under one worth £8.50 per week will support those in greatest need.

Neonatal Expenses Fund

The fund is a fantastic initiative and of particular benefit to families with multiples cared for in neonatal units across separate hospitals. Whilst the official guidance makes it clear that an application for support can be made for each baby in each setting this could be clearer on [the website](#), which currently states, “

“Twins and multiple birth

If you have twins or multiple babies in neonatal care and they are in the same hospital, you can claim once a day under the same rules as a single baby.

When you fill in the claim form you should add both babies' details and get it signed by hospital staff.”

Recommendation

- Update the website explanation to make the eligibility rules clearer for families with babies split across separate units and hospitals.

Maternity and Paternity Leave

Our background report looking at the experience of families who have twins, triplets or more and highlight the difficulties a number encounter who use up a significant amount of leave either due to hospitalisation prior to birth, or caring for their premature babies prior to bringing them home. For some families, there are ongoing

healthcare requirements throughout the first year. Nevertheless, a more detailed review of the needs of our families but also others that face similar challenges would be helpful.

Recommendation

- We suggest that the Government ask the Family Friendly Working Scotland partnership to look at the needs of families with one or more babies in neonatal care or who encounter considerable periods of hospitalisation or ill health during pregnancy or immediately after birth. They should consider if the provisions provided by employers and the state are sufficient and highlight examples of good practice for others to follow.

Childcare Costs

We are very supportive of the Governments' attempts to deliver good quality and affordable child care. The increase in funded childcare from 600 hours to 1,140 by 2020 for 3 to 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds is welcome.

Research shows that a large majority of multiple birth families find childcare costs hard to bear and in a third of instances mothers have to give up work because the costs are prohibitive. These proposals, whilst helpful for those who are eligible, do not address the biggest problem that a significant number of families face, which is having to meet all the costs of paying for multiple childcare places in one go, especially prior to universal entitlement beginning rather than being able to spread them out over a longer period, which is the normal pattern for parents who have one child at a time.

It is heartening to see the real attempts made at reducing barriers to accessing good quality childcare such as the [Deposit Guarantee Scheme \(DGS\) Pilot in Dumfries & Galloway, Edinburgh and Glasgow](#) and this approach could be used and extended to test proposals for our families.

Recommendation

- The Government's assessment of DSG should include the uptake of the deposit by eligible families with twins, triplets or more.
- The Government should also look to either extend the scheme or initiate a similar pilot to test whether making a childcare loan to meet the deposits and then monthly fees to all families with twins, triplets or more with children under 3 years of age. This would help to meet the additional costs of having more than one child receiving childcare at the very same time. The amount borrowed would then be repaid over a period of time either directly, or from state benefit entitlements.

Spreading Good Practice among Local Councils

The committee heard examples of good, kind, supportive councils who were willing to acknowledge and address the needs of families in real difficulty even if they did not meet nationally set eligibility criteria. There are many best practice examples of councils doing their best for these families that could be brought together to help explain to others the challenges that families face and how they can be supported.

Recommendation

- The Scottish Government should issue guidance for local authorities and other providers on the needs for families with twins, triplets and more. The topics and examples of good practice could include:
 - how councils have provided childcare support for families in difficulty,
 - Best practice in adoption, fostering placements, and surrogacy,
 - Pointers for early years childcare providers,
 - Advice on how teachers can support good school and classroom placement decisions when children first start schools,
 - How best to address additional developmental and educational needs of many of these children.
- Once produced and disseminated, the Government should encourage the [Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative](#) to implement the resulting output.

Further Research Reports from Tamba

Health

1. Tamba and NCT Maternity Services Report: Multiple births in Scotland - produced by Tamba in 2016. This report describes the findings of the Maternity Services survey distributed by Tamba to parents of multiples in Scotland and the UK. The survey covered a variety of topics including place of birth, quality of antenatal and postnatal care, neonatal care arrangements, feeding support and sleeping arrangements.
2. Health and Lifestyle Survey Report - "Multiple Failing" - produced by Tamba in 2009. The survey looked at families experience of pregnancy, birth and their postnatal experience. It covered a range of topics including gestational age and weight of twins or triplets, access to neonatal care, postnatal depression, help in the home and quality of feeding advice.
3. Healthcare Survey Report - "Making Progress" - produced by Tamba in 2012. This was a follow up to the 2009 survey and asked parents of twins, triplets and more to confirm their recent experience of pregnancy, birth and the early months.
4. Maternity Care for women expecting a multiple birth - produced by the NPEU in 2011. Using data from national surveys the report provides an overview of the care mothers of twins and triplets receive during pregnancy, labour and birth and in the early months that follow.
5. Tamba Maternity Services Survey Report - produced by Tamba in 2014. Compares and contrasts antenatal and postnatal services and support in several different countries. It highlights where excellent service delivery occurs and where there may be room for improvement.

Finances, Leave & childcare

6. "Children in Households with Multiple Births" - by the New Policy Institute in 2010. The report looks at household incomes and work status of parents of twins, triplets or more and the policy implications of these findings.

7. "Cost of Childcare in Households with Multiple Births" - produced by Tamba in 2013. This survey looked at the financial impact of childcare for parents of multiples.
8. "Multiple Births Parents' Experience of Maternity and Paternity Leave" - produced by Tamba in 2013. The report looks at multiple birth families' experience of leave. It highlights how the current legislation is 40 years out of date and has serious consequences for our families.
9. 'The Effects of Twins and Multiple Births Families and Their Living Standards' - produced by Birmingham University in 2010. It looks at the financial and social consequences of raising twins or triplets.

Education

10. "Results of Questionnaire Survey of Parents of Young Twins Regarding Placement of Twins in Primary School" - part one of a two part report produced by Tamba in 2015. This report assesses whether primary schools have a "twin policy" and how involved parents are in the decision to place their twins in the same or different classes.
11. "Results of a Survey of Adult Twins Regarding Their Experiences as a Twin at Primary School" - part two of a two part report produced by Tamba in 2015. The report gives the results of a survey of adult twins regarding their experiences as a twin at primary school. This survey was conducted by the Department of Twin Research on behalf of Tamba.
12. "Report into the Educational Needs and Experiences of Multiple Birth Children" - produced by Tamba in 2009. The report looks at the incidence of splitting twins across separate schools and the impact of classroom placement decisions on multiple birth children and includes data from the Twins Early Development Study (TEDs) at Kings College. It also looks at families' access to different types of play facilities and delaying starting school.

Relationships

13. 'Relationship Survey - challenges that couples face when there are multiples in the family' - produced by Tamba in 2006. The transition to parenthood can have a huge impact on a couples relationship. This issue has been discussed frequently through the family relationships session of Tamba's Parenting Course 'Parenting with Multiples in Mind" so we devised a survey to explore the challenges that couples face when there are multiples in the family. We had an astonishing 1,113 responses from parents all over the UK with 73 per cent from Tamba members and 54 per cent from twins clubs. Eight per cent were from fathers of multiples, four per cent from lone parents and five per cent from parents of triplets.

***Child benefit estimated costings workings**

Working on a estimation of there being 1608 twin babies born each year. Around 50% of these are born to families with existing children.

If first time parents receive £20.70 per child for twins this amounts to:

804 children X £7 (top up) = £5,628 per week more

£5628 x 52 weeks = £292,656 per year

If second time parents also receive the higher rate of £20.70 per child for twins, this amounts to:

804 children x £14 = £11,256 per week

£11x 52 weeks = £585,312

Total additional cost per year for these two groups is £877,968