

PE1683/E

Petitioner submission of 13 June 2018

I note the Scottish Government's position in relation to powers such as Universal Credit, Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit being reserved. I also note the Scottish Government's position on the two child limit, but feel that while it is important, it distracts from the issues at the heart of my petition.

I also note the comments about partial devolution preventing the Scottish Government from "using social security along with other public services to tackle long-term poverty and build sustainable economic growth". I would welcome some confirmation on how best to make head way with issues that are categorised as partially devolved.

I will respond to the comments in the Scottish Government's submission in turn but, for clarity, the ways in which I believe and would like to see the Scottish Government support families with multiples are to:-

- increase and match child benefit for each multiple born;
- provide more funding, earlier for childcare for families with multiples;
- provide further support for charities such as TAMBA and Homestart UK relative to multiple births; and
- provide support for improvements in maternity leave, maternity pay and paternity leave by bringing this petition to the attention of Westminster.

In order to do this, please commit to engaging with France, Ireland and Australia about their legislation and policies specific to having multiples.

Best Start Grant

In relation to the Scottish Government's comments and consultation on the Best Start Grant, I would refer to TAMBA's recommendations on this point.

Any help for low income families with multiples is welcome, however, those who find themselves barely outside the category of "low income" and have multiples, are particularly stretched due to the additional costs of having more than one child at a time.

Best Start Foods

I note the consultation on proposals for Best Start Foods is underway. Again, any help for low income families with multiples is welcome, however, those who find themselves barely outside the category of "low income" and have multiples, are particularly stretched due to the additional costs of having more than one child at a time.

Childcare

In terms of entitlement to funded early learning and childcare, the increased hours are welcome for 3 and 4 year olds.

As standard maternity leave is one year in length, I'd be grateful if the Government could review the childcare situation from ages 1 – 3, particularly in the case of multiple births, as the current situation is preventing many parents (usually women)

of multiples, from returning to work, as the cost of childcare almost matches or outweighs their salary. Further, over the preschool years, it works out more expensive to have multiples in childcare compared to two differently aged children.¹

As an example, I am one of these women, who earns well over the national minimum wage (I am a Solicitor with over 5 years post qualifying experience) and yet I would be no better off (financially) returning to work and putting my children into childcare. A career break was therefore the best option for my family.

I note the Government's reference to trialling a deposit guarantee scheme to help families with these upfront costs. I would be interested to know:-

- if again, this would only be for those categorised as "low income" families; and
- whether this help could be taken further to support families with multiples?

Initiatives such as childcare vouchers, tax free childcare, the childcare element of tax credits and Universal Credit are good, but I don't believe they go far enough.

Men's and women's roles in relation to work and childcare

The Scottish Government states it is "keen to challenge outdated assumptions about men's and women's roles in relation to work and childcare" and, in terms of maternity and paternity leave and pay, is "lobbying the UK Government to ensure that, as a minimum, existing provisions are maintained and there is no erosion of existing workers' rights".

I would welcome confirmation of whether the lobbying recommends any improvements for families with multiples.

There are also outdated assumptions that having multiples is equal to having to separate children physically, emotionally and financially. This is antiquated and could be addressed by references in legislation (e.g. child benefit legislation) and policy (e.g. employment policies).

I would also welcome confirmation of specific references to families with multiples, if any, within the Family Friendly Working Scotland policies.

The Scottish Government refers to "using flexibility and enhanced maternity and paternity leave as an employee benefit will help companies to attract talent to their business; and that if fathers take greater responsibility for childcare it will help to enable women to re-join the workplace, which will ultimately contribute to reducing the gender pay gap".

This is a positive step. Would there be specific reference to families with multiples and would there be a further push for enhancing maternity pay for families with multiples?

¹ The national average is two children born three years apart. Costs up to year 4 (when child 1 will be 3-4 years old) is approximately £23,000. The cost for twins up to year 4 will be approximately £58,000. Over 5 years the total cost for twins will be almost £70,000, compared to £64,000 for the national average over 7 years.

Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination Working Group

I note the work of this group. There is a lot of information on the website. Can you please provide specific examples of discussions relative to families with multiples?

Neonatal Expenses Fund

Please see TAMBA's recommendations here.

Please also note the NHSGGC Assisted Conception Services' position which states the following:-

“At Glasgow Royal Infirmary our aim is to help you achieve a healthy pregnancy. One way we can do this is by reducing your risk of a multiple birth (twins or higher). All pregnancy and birth-related complications for both mother and baby are increased during multiple pregnancy and childbirth when compared to a single pregnancy.”

Having multiples is not a lifestyle choice and the risks are clearly noted.

Baby Box

This initiative treats every child equally in Scotland and is therefore at juxtaposition with the child benefit legislation, which pays a premium to the first born as the arrival of the first child has the largest impact on finances.

If multiples are a mother's first pregnancy, in particular, what hasn't been considered is the requirement to buy two of many items at the same time - car seats, cots, nappies, food, formula, bottles, bedding, clothes, shoes. It has been estimated that having twins does not cost double, but is about 50% more than having one child (TwinsUK) and this should be accounted for. The Baby Box is a help to families with multiples (particularly if sleeping in the box does indeed help reduce cot deaths), but it is a bit off the mark as to the true needs of these families, for whom the cost of the box and its contents (£160, The Guardian) is a significant amount of money.

There are over 40 items in the Baby Box. 29 of these are reusable by subsequent children, yet they will also receive their own box full of unisex items. On that basis, it is my belief that subsequent children should receive their own baby box with a small number of non-reusable items. This would save a substantial amount of money, which I feel could be better used elsewhere.

Emotional support

I note the Scottish Government's work with TAMBA on the provision of emotional support, which goes beyond financial support, and agree with their comments about the good work that TAMBA does in this area. I am keen to understand what consideration has been given to funding TAMBA to continue its good work.

In summary, the introduction of some of the initiatives mentioned (BSG etc.) clearly evidences that the Scottish Government accepts that there is extra pressure on families with multiples, physically, emotionally and financially. This is a good start, but needs to go further so that:-

- women will be in a better position to return to work, sooner
- multiples put on an equal footing with singletons.