

PE1683/M

Petitioner submission of 7 November 2019

Thank you for the most recent response to the petition for better support for multiple births. I was pleased to see the number of initiatives being rolled out to help parents and guardians, some of which I benefited from myself.

I was, however, disappointed to see that these do not go further than targeting families with low or no income and are universal to all births. I believe this to be short sighted and would refer back to the original petition narrative and the presentation / questions at the committee meeting about the impact a multiple birth has on a family physically, emotionally and financially.

By putting all births on a level playing field, by its very nature, means that multiple births are at a disadvantage. A clear example of this is child benefit. Every first birth has a higher rate of child benefit payment and every second birth has a lower rate of child benefit payment.

As previously stated, the original policy reasoning for a higher rate on the first birth is because it is more impactful financially than subsequent births as you already have much of the equipment (e.g. some of the big ticket items being cot, car seat, pram, high chair, clothes, shoes, breast pump, bouncer, monitor) and know how. I think we can all agree that multiple births cannot be directly compared to having a child, then having a subsequent child here. As most families plan to have one child at a time, they often struggle to have up to double the costs all at once, whether that be paying for nursery fees or having to buy shoes. A way of combatting that stress would be to reconsider child benefit payments in line with its original policy intention.

It is vital that:

- more research commissioned by the Scottish Government is carried out to understand fully the impact having a multiple birth has on a family (comparatively to that of a singleton birth) financially** (e.g. often one parent, usually a woman, has to take time away from the workplace or change their work or pattern which has a direct impact on income / the higher nursery fees when you have two or more children at once than if you have one at a time - see original petition for workings on this), physically (e.g. being a high risk pregnancy and birth can have complications, such as Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome) and emotionally (e.g. a higher rate of post natal depression and relationship breakdown within the multiple birth community linked to high risk pregnancy, the many more premature babies requiring time in hospital at birth and throughout their lives, and the pressures that attach). The sum of a combination of these factors can lead to difficulties for families with multiple births and the support of Twins Trust (previously TAMBA) (and other organisations locally) is a life line;
- support mechanisms are put in place to treat multiples births as a criterion for targeted support, almost akin to a protected characteristic; and

- gain better understanding of why Ireland, France and Australia offer a more structured package of support to multiple birth families than we do in the U.K. by writing to their Governments for a comparative piece.

I acknowledge all the good work that is being done by the Government to support parents and guardians as a whole, but multiples births are still at a disadvantage as they are not accounted for in many of the initiatives on their own merits.

**There is evidence to suggest that multiple birth families carry a higher financial burden with many having to go into debt with a commercial lender.

[The effects of twins and multiple births on families and their living standards](#) is a report which was published in 2010 report by Professor Stephen Mackay, Chair of Social Research at University of Birmingham. The report, which was compiled for Twins Trust (previously TAMBA), states the following:-

“If the mothers of singletons had the same age profile as the mothers of twins, their incomes would be significantly higher and it would be clearer that families with twins were more likely to be on a low income. Even without such adjustments, families with a multiple birth are less likely to have high incomes.

The top quarter of families had incomes above c.£460 per week, compared with families with a multiple birth were an income of c.£393 would put them in the top quarter of incomes among this group (see table 3.4).

Despite an apparent rough similarity in income levels, parents raising twins or triplets report higher levels of financial stress (see table 3.5). Whilst 26% of all families said they were ‘living comfortably’, and 28% of those raising singletons when age-matched to multiple births, only 17% of those raising twins or triplets could say the same. Some 13% of those with a multiple birth said they were finding it quite difficult, rather than 8% for those raising a single child (which would fall to 7% if their mothers’ age profile matched that of multiple births).

In terms of the previous year, during which the sampled child or children were born, 62% of the multiple birth group said they were now financially worse off, compared with 41% of other parents. Only 11% of those raising twins/triplets said they were better off, compared with 19% for all mothers.

The last section of Table 3.5 looks at what has happened to parents’ savings. About half of those raising twins or triplets had used up some or all of their savings, compared with 37% for all families in this study (see table 3.5).”

On a final, separate note, I wanted to say that it is fantastic that the Scottish Government fund Twins Trust (previously TAMBA) however due to circumstances outwith their control, Twins Trust are still waiting to hear about their funding bid they were invited to apply for in February 2019 for a project which supports and educates expectant parents of multiples. Might there be any update on this please? Thank you.