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08 January 2026

Dear Bob

Thank you for your letter of 27 November 2025 requesting information from the Scottish Government on Job Start Payment and Funeral Support Payment. I am writing to respond to the points in your letter relating to these benefits.

Social Security is a human right that could be needed by anyone at any time. As such, the Scottish Government is focused on ensuring that all eligible people can access all the devolved social security support they are entitled to. This is both a statutory obligation and a central priority. The current benefit take-up strategy, published in 2021, provides the framework, through a principles-based approach, to addressing barriers to benefit take-up across all devolved payments and covers a wide range of activity spanning the areas of pre-application support, benefit promotion and accessible communications and processes. The next Benefit Take-Up Strategy is due by October 2026 and will draw on lessons learned from the current strategy and the Scottish Government's Seldom-Heard Group Action Plan, published this year.

Funeral Support Payment

When Funeral Support Payment launched in September 2019, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland made the application process more accessible than the Funeral Expenses Payment, administered by the Department for Work & Pensions, by offering multiple application channels, including online, phone and paper applications. The UK Government does not offer such flexibility and online applications for the UK equivalent payment are not available. The Scottish Government also broadened eligibility to reflect the complexity of modern family relationships, meaning applicants do not need to be the

closest relative of the deceased. Since that time (up to 30th September 2025) more than £66 million has been paid in Funeral Support Payments with £6.2 million paid in the first six months of the 2025/2026 financial year.

The Funeral Support Payment evaluation, published in July 2022, showed that clients viewed the application process as being quick and easy. It also highlighted there were lessons to learn, including from clients who struggled to apply due to English not being their first language; a lack of digital confidence; or having learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service is available in all 32 local authorities and provides people with face to face help to understand eligibility and complete their application form, helping people access payments they are entitled to.

In December 2024 the Scottish Government introduced amendments to the Funeral Support Payment regulations to reflect varying funeral trends and following stakeholder feedback. The changes included applying a reasonability test when a funeral takes place within the UK but outside the local authority area where the deceased lived, providing clients with help towards funeral costs based on what is deemed reasonable. The amendments also introduced changes to deduct available assets of the deceased from an award of Funeral Support Payment, rather than denying an application outright if it was deemed that there were sufficient funds available in the deceased's estate. Finally, the definition of funeral in the regulations was also amended to include hydrolysis, future proofing regulations in the event of hydrolysis becoming a regulated form of body disposal in Scotland. Hydrolysis is also currently available outside the UK. The decision to include hydrolysis in the definition of a funeral ensures that regulated forms of body disposal are available to clients accessing Funeral Support Payment and avoids potentially influencing the client's choice of funeral if hydrolysis was not specified within the regulations, which is not the policy intent. These measures were designed and implemented to extend the eligibility criteria and ensure that support could get to those eligible to receive it.

There is a higher degree of uncertainty in the estimate of eligibility for Funeral Support Payment than other benefits because of the need to identify the likelihood of the person responsible for the funeral being eligible. For that reason, it is reasonable to expect variation in take-up rates year to year. Not everyone who is eligible for Funeral Support Payment will apply, as many people make provisions for their own funeral and there is increased use of pre-paid funeral plans reducing the need for support. The nature of Funeral Support Payment – a one-off benefit which people may have need of at a specific point – means it is important that information is available to eligible people at relevant touchpoints. Working in partnership with stakeholders is therefore key to this approach.

Officials continue to engage with the Scottish Government's Funeral Poverty and Funeral Support Payment Reference Group. This group provides the opportunity to discuss the wider landscape of funeral and bereavement issues in Scotland and the opportunity to raise awareness of the benefit during these meetings.

In addition to this work by the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland has hosted and attended various stakeholder events to promote Funeral Support

Payment. It has an ongoing partnership with Glasgow Central Mosque, an organisation which provides a funeral director service for Muslim members, to build awareness of this payment and encourage application. More recently, Scottish Muslim Funeral Services invited Social Security Scotland to speak at their funeral support event for community faith leaders at the Edinburgh Central Mosque.

Social Security Scotland regularly hosts digital events attended by funeral directors, registrars, third and public sector organisations. This financial year, 200 stakeholders have signed up for online stakeholder events including Age Scotland, Alzheimer Scotland, Maggies, Macmillan Cancer Support, Funeral Directors, Citizens Advice Bureaus and Housing Associations. These events have been vital in engaging with stakeholders who work with seldom heard groups and enable meaningful conversations where partners can ask more nuanced questions and provide feedback.

Social Security Scotland has also presented and exhibited at the Scottish Bereavement Network Conference alongside key stakeholders such as Cruse Scotland, SANDS, Richmond Hope and Child Bereavement UK. In addition, it has also hosted all-benefits overview sessions with Families Outside, Community Link Workers and during Challenge Poverty Week saw hundreds of stakeholders learn about Funeral Support Payment. Social Security Scotland ensures that stakeholder organisations such as hospitals, maternity wards, funeral directors and grief support groups receive relevant leaflets and other print material specifically designed to assist in difficult conversations around funerals and the financial support available.

Several news releases are issued by Social Security Scotland throughout the year to highlight, via media channels, the support available and the changes that have been introduced. Funeral Support Payment is regularly promoted on Social Security Scotland's Facebook page and web articles are published on the corporate website directing stakeholders to available information and resources.

Local partnership models such as East Ayrshire's Respectful Funeral Service are important in helping to improve awareness and simplifying access for eligible people. Social Security Scotland recognises the value of these partnerships and insights from approaches like these are informing ongoing work to improve take-up.

Job Start Payment

Job Start Payment is only available in Scotland and is intended to help cover costs such as travel, work clothes, lunches or childcare as a person starts employment. The Scottish Government has learnt and implemented improvements since its introduction in August 2020 and following an evaluation of the benefit, published in 2022. This showed that some eligible clients may have had their claims denied because they were unable to provide the supporting job offer evidence. Some young people reported that they are encouraged to take short, paid work placements which interrupt long spells of unemployment. That evaluation also positively showed that those who had applied found the claim process

straightforward and manageable, particularly when support was available from advisors or third-sector partners.

The Scottish Government recognises that Job Start Payment continues to have the lowest take-up rate of any Scottish benefit. To improve take-up the Scottish Government introduced increased accessibility to the payment for young people, extending the application window from 3 months to 6 months after the job offer date, the job offer evidence required was simplified and earnings from one off trial shifts were also disregarded when establishing if the young person has been out of work for 6 months. Recognising the communication preferences of this younger client group, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland worked together to introduce contact by text message, making it easier to get in touch and to help them progress their applications. The Scottish Government is continuing to explore ways to make it easier for young people to apply for this benefit.

Job Start Payment is aimed at easing the transition into work of young people who have been unemployed for a period of time and up to 30 September 2025 had issued payments of £2.0 million. As with Funeral Support Payment, the one-off nature of the benefit means a key focus for building awareness of Job Start Payment is partnership working with stakeholders. Social Security Scotland has worked closely with partners such as DWP, facilitating stakeholder engagement sessions to make sure information is available at Job Centres and advisors are able to cascade information to their clients. It has also attended national career fairs throughout Scotland to raise awareness of the payment with eligible young people. Social Security Scotland have also hosted bespoke digital events for organisations such as Skills Development Scotland and worked with them to amplify other stakeholder events during apprenticeships week.

Job Start Payment materials (e.g. leaflets, promo cards, posters) are distributed to Job Centres, career hubs in schools and colleges, Skill Development Scotland offices and Developing Young Workforce partners. Social Security Scotland also regularly issues social media content across its channels to raise awareness of the benefit and encourage eligible people to apply. Further information is available on mygov.scot.

You requested information in relation to fraud or misuse of funds associated with both benefits. All suspected fraud cases are taken seriously by Social Security Scotland, and all allegations of fraud are investigated and, where appropriate, evidence is submitted to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal.

A very small minority of people may seek to abuse the system for financial gain and up to 1 December 2025 two cases of Funeral Support Payment were reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service resulting in one admonishment and one fiscal warning. While people must provide evidence of the funeral costs they incur as part of the eligibility process, Social Security Scotland does not track how people receiving any Social Security Scotland entitlements use their payments because it is committed to treating people in Scotland with dignity, fairness and respect when they apply for benefits and in line with statutory obligations will always give people a choice as to whether they pay the funeral director directly. The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are however aware

that there are a small number of Funeral Directors who are asking for all Funeral Support Payment to be paid directly irrespective of the wish of the applicant.

The next Benefit Take-Up Strategy is due by October 2026 and will draw on the lessons learned from the current strategy, including the activity detailed in this letter. Prior to publication, once the strategy is prepared, Scottish Ministers must lay it before the Scottish Parliament and then make it publicly available. While the UK Government has no comparable strategy, the Scottish Government remains firmly committed to supporting access to social security and ensuring that people receive the support they are entitled to.

I trust that this information will be helpful.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Shirley-Anne', written in a cursive style.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE