



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Office of Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)
Department of Health
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

3/4/2020

Dear Baroness Boycott,

Subject: OPQ - Baroness Boycott to ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to review the operation of the Healthy Start scheme – Monday 30th March 2020

I am sorry not to have had the opportunity to discuss this question, and the Healthy Start scheme more generally, with you. A copy of this letter will also be placed in the Library of the House so all members can read it.

Healthy Start supports lower-income families to provide a healthy diet for their children and contributes to wider Government priorities on childhood obesity, prevention and on levelling up. The Government has been working to review the operation of the Healthy Start scheme and is currently developing a digital approach, which will make it easier for families to apply for, receive and use Healthy Start benefits.

The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) is delivering the project to digitise the Healthy Start scheme, with the Department of Health and Social Care remaining responsible for policy and legislation on Healthy Start. As part of the development of the digital approach, NHSBSA is testing an on-line application form to replace the current paper form, which we recognise can be difficult for some families to complete, and a payment card to replace paper vouchers. We are using the experiences of families, healthcare professionals, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and existing best practice to improve the Healthy Start scheme.

These changes will be underpinned by the Healthy Start Scheme and Welfare Food (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2020, which were laid before Parliament on 19 March 2020 and are due to come into force on 6 April 2020. The amending regulations allow for both a paper-based and a digitised Healthy Start scheme to be provided and will support the transition to the new service. The regulations also amend the definition of 'Healthy Start food' to introduce pulses, canned fruit and vegetables into the scheme. These changes will come into force a little later, in October 2020, to allow retailers the necessary time to prepare for the changes.

I hope this will reassure you of the Government's commitment to the Healthy Start scheme and the work underway to support families to access the scheme.

Yours sincerely

LORD BETHELL