Guidance

Child Maintenance Service statistics: background information and methodologies

Updated 24 March 2021

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Purpose of the statistics

This document provides an overview of the performance of the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) and the Child Support Agency (CSA). It also provides information on how the statistics are produced.

The statistics are published in the collection of Child Maintenance Service statistics.

This publication does not include information on the Child Support Agency (CSA). Statistics on the CSA are available from the CSA quarterly statistical summary and CSA case closure publications.

Context

Child maintenance is financial support between separated parents to help with the everyday living costs of raising their children.

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a 'family based arrangement'. Family based arrangements can be made by the court but child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no one else has to be involved.

The Child Maintenance Service, which replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA), is for when the parents cannot agree on a family based arrangement.

Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first contact Child Maintenance Service and complete the application process. Also, impartial support and advice to help parents pick the child maintenance arrangement best suited to their situation.

When a parent makes an application to the Child Maintenance Service, they will be told if it has been successfully set up. The Child Maintenance Service then tells the paying parent between three days. This service is known as Direct Pay.

If parents cannot arrange payments between themselves, or if the paying parent does not keep to the agreement, they can ask the Child Maintenance Service. Child Maintenance Service is called the case that the collect and Pay service. This service collects and manages payments between the parents. Including recovery of unpaid maintenance payments. The Child Maintenance Service also offers a variation service to help separated parents. To use the Collect and Pay service, paying parents are charged 20% of their child maintenance, and receiving parents 4%. this is intended to encourage parents to collaborate.

Time period covered

A list of the definitions and terminology used within these statistics.

Appeals

Parents who have made an appeal to the Child Maintenance Service or the Registry's Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) to review a decision made by the Child Maintenance Service.

Application fee

Applications to the Child Maintenance Service initially incur a £20 fee with the exception of those who have experienced domestic abuse or under 19 years old.

Application fee exemptions

If the parent making the application to the Child Maintenance Service is under 19 years old or declares that they, or their child, have been the victim of domestic abuse, then they do not have to pay the application fee.

Applications

The total number of applications made to the Child Maintenance Service in a three month period.

Arrangement

For the purposes of this publication, an arrangement is an agreement to provide financial support for a child's everyday living costs.

Case closure

The process of ending the liability and closing all cases on the Child Support Agency. Parents were then encouraged to contact Child Maintenance Options to discuss what to do next.

Caseload

The number of child maintenance arrangements being managed by the Child Maintenance Service.

Change of circumstances

Events can mean a change to their circumstances. The Child Maintenance Service records this information and updates maintenance calculations where necessary.

Children covered

The number of children for whom the paying parent has a child maintenance arrangement.

Collect and Pay

The Child Maintenance Service collects and manages payments from the paying parent for the receiving parent. If required, the Child Maintenance service will take enforcement actions.

Compliance

This measures how much maintenance has been successfully collected from the Paying Parents compared to the total amount of maintenance due to be paid. The aim of the service is that there would be none. Note that, if a parent is trying to settle arrears that have previously accumulated, they would need to pay more than the amount of new maintenance arranged during the quarter.

Direct Pay

The Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount of maintenance to be paid, and parents arrange the payments between themselves.

Domestic abuse

Any incident of controlling, coercive, or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.

Enforcement

When a paying parent using the Collect and Pay service does not pay their child maintenance the service can take action to recover money owed. The Child Maintenance Service can collect unpaid child maintenance in 3 different ways:

1. Deduction from earnings order or request – the Child Maintenance Service can instruct a paying parent's employer to deduct child maintenance from the paying parent's earnings.
2. Deduction from benefits – the Child Maintenance Service may recover unpaid Maintenance from a paying parent's bank or building society account.
3. Liability order – the Child Maintenance Service can apply to a court (see unpaid maintenance). The court can grant liability orders, which allow the Child Maintenance Service to take such as referral to enforcement agents, who can seize goods in order to sell them to pay the outstanding maintenance. Also, the court can place a charge on a homeowner; court can grant a charging order against the property which would prevent any sale without repayment of the outstanding amount. Ultimately, it would be the court that could send someone to prison for not paying. Note that, in most instances, but, the Child Maintenance Service can apply for the court to disqualify a parent from driving or helping a passport, or to send them to prison.

Intake

The number of new arrangements joining the Child Maintenance Service.

Mandatory reconsiderations

Where a parent has asked the Child Maintenance Service to reconsider a decision on how much child maintenance should be paid.

Money due

The amount of child maintenance that is due to be paid. This is calculated by the Child Maintenance Service and should be paid by the quarter. This does not include the fees due to the Child Maintenance Service.

Money paid

The amount of child maintenance paid. This does not include any fees paid to the Child Maintenance Service.

Paying parent

The parent who does not have main day-to-day care of the child and pays child maintenance.

Receiving parent

The parent with main day-to-day care of the child and who receives child maintenance.

Sanctions

These are enforcement actions such as sending paying parents to prison, disqualifying them from driving or from holding a passport. These sanctions are only used when every other method of recovering unpaid child maintenance has been tried. The Child Maintenance Service can also impose sanctions when they believe the paying parent can pay but they are refusing to do so.

Shared-care

Where a paying parent's child stays overnight with them. In these cases, the Child Maintenance Service makes a deduction to the weekly child maintenance amount based on the average number of shared-care nights a week.

Unpaid maintenance

The amount of child maintenance that the paying parent has not paid.

Users and uses

The main users of the statistics in this document are:

- the public
- interested groups
- Parliament
- Department for Work and Pensions Ministers
- ministers and officials in other government departments
- academics
- media and external commentators

These statistics are used by a number of purposes:

- monitoring and reporting of the Child Maintenance Services performance in Great Britain
- internal analysis to help measure and improve the performance of the Child Maintenance Service
- informing ministerial briefings and press releases
- answering Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests
- policy evaluations to help improve users gauge the performance of the Child Maintenance Service
- briefing ministers and meetings with external stakeholders and PPS
- social research and academic studies of the impact of social policy

Data quality and sources

Data sources

The statistics in this publication come from different data sources. Some of these are from administrative data, management information and some from calculations. The table below ensures that all our tables are based on the most accurate and relevant data available.

Administrative data

Data is collected and stored on the Child Maintenance Service computer systems. Data on all payments using the service is collected and the quality of this information is good.

Management information

This is aggregate information and statistics collected and used by the Child Maintenance Service to manage the business, monitor performance and inform customers. It is not collected for statistical purposes but is used for these purposes. The terms administrative data and management information are sometimes used interchangeably. The quality of this information is good.

Clerical data

This is gathered manually and usually stored in spreadsheets. As the data is entered manually it goes through multiple checks to ensure its accuracy. The quality of this information is good.

We believe all our data sources meet publishable standards.

The following tables sets out the source(s) for each table.

Table	Measure	Source
1	Applications to the Child Maintenance Service	Management information
1	Application fee exemptions	Management information
1	Intake	Management information
1	Service Type Volumes	Administrative Data
1	Money due and Received Quarter	Management information
1	Arrangements Not Requiring Money Collection	Management information
1	Enforcement Actions	Administrative and Management information
1,2	Enforcement Actions – Detail on Sanctions	Management information
1	Financial Compliance (Unit – Actions)	Management information
1	Change of Circumstances	Management information
1	Paternity Reconsiderations	Management information
1	Appeals	Management information
1	Complaints	Management information
1	Telephony	Management information
Cost Tables	Children, Arrangements and Paying Parents	Administrative Data

Arrangements, paying parents, and children: criteria for inclusion in the statistics

Which arrangements are included in these statistics?

In general, counts of arrangements (including applicants) include all open child maintenance arrangements managed by the Child Maintenance Service, or arrangements where the Child Maintenance Service. For an arrangement to be open, either:

- the paying parent has an ongoing liability to pay child maintenance, even if the amount is calculated as zero as a result of the paying parent's circumstances), or
- there are outstanding child maintenance arrears owed by the paying parent

Some arrangements which were previously managed by the Child Support Agency have been closed to new applications since 3 March 2014. These arrangements are included in the CSA and Legacy Other Statutory Scheme Cases (LOSC) tables. The Child Maintenance Service now only deals with new cases.

Counts of arrangements (and applications) do not include those for which arrears that remain owed by the paying parent to the receiving parent, but which are not in the Child Maintenance Service. Such no-ongoing maintenance has become due to cases under the Child Maintenance Service. Historically, statistics relating to other processes (for example, applications, complaints, appeals, mandatory reconsiderations, enforcement actions) include no or actions relating to such arrangements.

Which children are included in these statistics?

Counts of children included in these statistics include all children who are associated with an open arrangement (as defined above), and are below 20 years of age.

This will include a small number of individuals, between 16 and 19 years of age, who are no longer considered as qualifying child for the purposes of calculating ongoing child maintenance, but for whom child maintenance arrangement is still being collected because they are a sixth form or college qualifying child.

This is because individuals in this age bracket only qualify for child maintenance if:

- they are in full-time non-advanced education, or
- the receiving parent is still entitled to Child Benefit in respect of that child

At present, the data available for statistics does not allow us to distinguish whether children between 16 and 19 years of age meet these criteria.

Which paying parents are included in these statistics?

The counts of paying parents available on the Stat Xplore tool include all unique paying parents associated with arrangements being the criteria defined above.

Use of estimates in December 2018

During December 2018, there was a problem with data feeds which affected some of the figures reported for December 2018. Data were corrected as far as possible. However, the following tables / metrics were still significantly affected, and were replaced with estimated values, which were calculated as indicated below:

Money due and paid during the quarter ending December 2018 (Table 5)

Estimates were calculated by finding the average (mean) of the value empirical / paid for the quarter ending November 2018, and (i) the value empirical / paid for the quarter ending December 2017, and (ii) the value for the quarter ending December 2016. This was carried out independently for the following metrics:

- amount of Child Maintenance due through the Collect and Pay service
- amount of Child Maintenance due through the Collect and Pay service
- amount of Child Maintenance paid through the Collect and Pay service

Values collected via deduction from earnings orders and requests (Table 7.1)

For the total money collected from Paying Parents via deduction from earnings orders and requests, estimates were calculated by finding the average (mean)

(i) the value collected during the quarter ending November 2018, and

(ii) the value collected during the quarter ending January 2019 (these figures were not affected by the data problem)

Methodological revisions and publication changes

This section sets out methodological revisions and changes to the publication which have resulted in earlier published statistics being systematically revised, or deemed to be of sufficient importance to be highlighted. Information on Child Support Agency publication (data to June 2019), are outlined in the relevant release documents.

To note, The order of tables and the numbering scheme has changed over time, the table number referenced is correct for the time line changes were made. Tables have been included to avoid ambiguity.

September 2019 publication (data to June 2019)

1. Table 10 (Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service) and the Regional breakdowns (Table 1 Applications, Table 2 Arrangements, Table 3 Children covered) (and therefore children) is service legacy. Figures for previous quarters were revised to include the relevant children for the Child Maintenance Service.

- previously, if a Paying Parent made any payments via the Collect & Pay service during a calendar quarter, all arrangements that parent paid through were been recorded under 'Collect & Pay'. Paying', even if they were using Direct Pay at the end of the quarter. This was due to the system not being able to differentiate
- the actual number of arrangements not yet accepted for a service type were previously recorded as being covered by the Collect & Pay service

Approximately 3% of children covered in March 2019 were misrepresented in the statistics as a result of these errors. This rises to approximately 6% for figures relating to the Collect & Pay service. Due to the greater number of arrangements not assigned to service types.

2. Table 6 (The Number of Paying Parents and their Child Maintenance Arrangements) and Table 7.1 (Money Collected via Deductions from Earnings Orders and Requests) (and therefore on the Child Maintenance Service). This is consequence of a problem with the unique Paying Parent National Insurance Numbers associated with arrangements. Previously, the Child Maintenance Service was not accurately recording the number (e.g. zero) back at the end of December 2017 were used to give the count for December 2017). The methodology has now changed: the most recent data is now used to identify the number of Paying Parents associated with each case. This has resulted in small updates in revisions (e.g. where the National Insurance Number for the Paying Parent was unknown at the time of reporting but has since been identified). Although there is no material change to the overall trend, the number of Paying Parents in Table 6 has been revised upwards by approximately 12%, with the exception of Jan 2017 (which was revised upwards minimal of 2.4%).

3. Table 5 (Enforcement Actions): counts of Civil Enforcement Actions (Liability Orders, Enforcement Agents, Sanctions, Other Civil Enforcement Actions) 'in process', 'completed' and 'total' have been revised back to December 2017. Previously, the data only includes actions that were ongoing at the end of the quarter.

4. Table 10 (Enforcement Actions): counts of liability orders applied for, granted, and discharged have been revised back to December 2017. Previously, the data only included consecutive ending dates of actions (except for Other Civil Enforcement Actions, which with data provided elsewhere in Table 5).

5. Table 10 (Enforcement Actions): previously included statistics on the total amount of maintenance collected from parents undergoing a Civil Enforcement Actions or with a liability order in place. This data was based on information from Table 7.1 (Money Owed Figures) no longer considered fit for purpose due to the following methodological issues which cannot easily be fixed:

- money collected towards the payment of arrears occurred under the Child Support Agency, and is not recorded against individual cases in the Collect & Pay service
- the reported figure counted any money collected during the quarter, from paying parents who had an ongoing enforcement action or Deduction from Earnings Order and Request at the end of the quarter. This means that some payments may have been made towards previous arrears.

6. Table 10 (Enforcement Actions): the information source used to produce Deduction from Earning Order / Request statistics in Table 12 has been changed, to ensure figures are based on Management Reports. Changes to published figures are minimal, (one or two rounding unit (0/5)).

December 2019 publication (data to September 2019)

1. The release document now published is a workbook (HTML) format, rather than a PDF. There are number of benefits to this: the new format is intended to be more accessible, and easier for complex data tables.

2. Table 6 (The Number of Paying Parents and their Child Maintenance Arrangements) and Table 7.1 (Money Collected via Deductions from Earnings Orders and Requests) (and Table 5 Money Owed Figures). Previously, the Child Maintenance Service used the previous reported counts of Paying Parents, children, and arrangements to calculate the current quarter figures. This was done to ensure that the figures reported for previously closed Child Maintenance Service cases were consistent with the values of cases where Child Maintenance Service was still open. However, this approach has now been changed. Child Maintenance Service but have subsequently moved to the service in Great Britain. This means that the figures for previously closed cases will be calculated from scratch. Changes to published figures are minimal, (one or two rounding unit (0/5)).

Glossary

The relative discomfort, loss of privacy, or other consequences of being subjected to the statistics as a result of these errors. This rises to approximately 6% for figures relating to the Collect & Pay service. Due to the greater number of arrangements not assigned to service types.

2. Table 6 (The Number of Paying Parents and their Child Maintenance Arrangements) and Table 7.1 (Money Collected via Deductions from Earnings Orders and Requests) (and Table 5 Money Owed Figures). Previously, the Child Maintenance Service used the previous reported counts of Paying Parents, children, and arrangements to calculate the current quarter figures. This was done to ensure that the figures reported for previously closed Child Maintenance Service cases were consistent with the values of cases where Child Maintenance Service was still open. However, this approach has now been changed. Child Maintenance Service but have subsequently moved to the service in Great Britain. This means that the figures for previously closed cases will be calculated from scratch. Changes to published figures are minimal, (one or two rounding unit (0/5)).

Contact

Feedback

Leaflets

Annex: CPI conversion

1. Table 1 (Applications to the Child Maintenance Service) now only reports on the status of applications made in the last 12 months. This is because the source information is not updated beyond this timeframe.

4. Notational Tables: the order of tables and the numbering scheme has changed so that tables relating to the same theme are now grouped together.

March 2020 publication (data to December 2019)

1. Table 6 (Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service) and the Regional Tables: there have been corrections relating to counts of children covered. This affects figures published from December 2019 and these have been revised in this publication. The reason for correct the following:

- previously, a small number of children who had duplicated records in the source dataset were being counted multiple times. This has been corrected by only count records once. leading to a 1% reduction in counts of children covered by the Child Maintenance Service

2. Table 7 (Shared Care): there have been corrections relating to Shared Care counts, affecting figures reported for previous quarters. These have been revised in this publication. The changes correct the following:

- previously, the methodology did not include systematic rules to handle cases in which children covered by the same Child Maintenance Service arrangement had different Shared Care status. In such cases, the Shared Care status reported reflected the highest level of Shared Care used in an arrangement. This has resulted in:
  - the number of arrangements using Shared Care being revised upwards by approximately 2%
  - the number of arrangements in which at least one child spends "equal nights with both parents" is more affected, and has been revised upwards by approximately 10%

3. Table 12 (Enforcements Actions): the introduction of a new table relating to sanctions to the Child Support Agency. This table has been created from Table 12 to Table 12 1.

4. Table 12 (Enforcement Actions – Detail on Sanctions): this new table provides more detail relating to passport confiscations, disqualifications from driving and prison sentences for England and Wales and Scotland respectively. This table has been added in response to user demand.

When considering this data, the user should be aware of the following:

- the table has been split into two tables, one covering England and Wales, and one covering Scotland separately. This is to reflect the differing legal systems in the two regions (for further details refer to table footnotes)
- the table only includes data relating to cases found in open court. Closed court cases are not included to protect the disclosure risk to individuals for these sensitive cases
- Table 12 (Enforcement Actions) includes information on cases found in open court or caution. There will also be the number of "Sanctions Imposed" given in Table 12 1, which includes cases where:
  - a Compliance was achieved following a warning letter being issued by the Paying Parent
  - the Child Maintenance Service determined that the Paying Parent did not have the means to pay their liabilities
  - the Child Maintenance Service decided not to apply for court due to other specific circumstances of the case
- outcomes in England and Wales are reported based on the time that the result was received in the Magistrates' Court/Crown Court. This may be within a few days of an initial hearing, although longer delays occasionally occur
- in a small number of cases in England and Wales incompatible record keeping has meant that the outcome of a case has been recorded. These cases have been identified as "Not recorded". This clerical information has not previously been used for statistical purposes and we are continuing to investigate the quality of the underlying data. We will ensure that information remains at the standard required for Official Statistics
- sanctions may be suspended (or additionally 'Sisted' or 'Continued' in Scotland). Eventually, this means a Paying Parent agrees to pay what is owed and a plan is put in place to do so. In Scotland, Sisted cases are recorded as Sanctions Imposed but enforced and such instances will appear as additional outcomes in this table

June 2020 publication (data to March 2020)

1. Data at arrangement level has transferred to the Department for Work and Pension's Data Science team.

Stat Xplore enables users to create customised statistical tables relating to arrangements on - and children covered by - the Child Maintenance Service. New data on Paying Parents using the Child Maintenance Service has been released with users in mind, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Geography
- Compliance
- Outstanding debt
- Method of Payment
- Number of Arrangements
- Number of Children Covered
- Universal Credit Status

Figures within Stat Xplore are unrounded. However, a technique called perturbation has been used to randomly adjust cell values. Small random errors are introduced to calls although the information value of the results as a whole is not impacted. Minimal adjustment of the data is considered to be the most satisfactory technique for avoiding the release of identifiable data. Read more information on this technique.

In comparison, figures within the National Tables and the Release are rounded. Where the National Tables and the Release refer to Stat Xplore numbers the usual rounding convention has been applied for consistency. This means it is possible that a small number of arrangement figures will differ by 1 rounding unit (RU) when perturbation and rounding is applied together.

Resultant changes to Excel tables from Stat Xplore:

- Redundant National Tables: three much Child Maintenance Service Paying Parents (but not Children) Excel Tables 32 and Paying Parents Compliance (formerly Table 6) have been removed from the National Tables. Paying Parents Excel data is now available on Stat Xplore
- Table References: table numbers have changed, as a result of bullet 1 (see the contents page in the ODS files for further details.)

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2. A minor issue has been found in the source data for December 2020. We estimate that around 1800 (0.2%) arrangements have been omitted from this quarter's data. This has been caused by a small number of cases where the Paying Parent is investigated and therefore these figures may be revised upwards slightly in the next publication.

Status of the statistics

Experimental statistics

The statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority, while they undergo evaluation they are labelled as experimental statistics.

Feedback

We welcome feedback

DWP would like to hear your views on our statistical publications. If you use any of our statistics publications, we would be interested in hearing what you use them for and how well they meet your requirements. Please email DWP at: sm.analysis.mailbox@dwp.gsi.gx

Useful links

Find more information relating to arrangements on the Child Maintenance Service, available via the Department for Work and Pensions Transparency tool.

Read previous releases.

For information and statistics on Child Maintenance Options and family-based arrangements please see the quarterly series reports of parents using Family Based Arrangements (FBA).

Read further information and statistics on the performance and closure of the Child Support Agency.

Annex: CMS overview

figure 1: High-level overview of the Child Maintenance Service

Overview of the Child Maintenance Service

Family-based arrangement

Family-based arrangements are private ways to sort out child maintenance. Parents can make family-based arrangements even if they receive benefits. They can include financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element or transactions in kind.

Child Maintenance Service

The Child Maintenance Service which replaces the Child Support Agency (CSA) is for when the parents can't agree to a family-based arrangement.

Since June 2014, parents making an application to the Child Maintenance Service are charged £20 to make the application. If the parent making the application to the Child Maintenance Service is a victim of domestic abuse, or has been the victim of domestic abuse, then they do not have to pay the application fee.

Direct Pay

The Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount of maintenance to be paid and parents then arrange the payments between themselves.

Collect and Pay

If the parents cannot agree to a direct pay arrangement or they do not pay what was agreed, the Child Maintenance Service can collect and manage the payments between the parents.

Since August 2014 the paying parent pays a 20% collection fee and the receiving parent has a 4% reduction on their payment.

Maintenance

Arrangements vary within an agreed payment schedule and are reviewed annually.

If there are no changes of circumstances, the arrangement will continue until the youngest child on the arrangement turns 20 years old

Direct Pay is ineffective

Parents can move to Collect and Pay.

Collect and Pay is effective

Parents free to return to Direct Pay after 6 months.

Enforcement

Where payments are missed or not made in full the account will have unpaid maintenance.

Money owed can be taken by a deduction from earnings or in serious cases a custodial sentence can be given to someone who refuses to pay child maintenance.

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