

Child Maintenance Service Statistics

Background information and methodology

September 2019



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Purpose of the statistics

This document provides an overview of the performance of the Child Maintenance Service with the most up-to-date statistics and breakdowns. 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:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-support-agency-quarterly-summary-statistics--2>

Context

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

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a 'family-based arrangement'. A family-based arrangement is a private way to sort out 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 to a family-based arrangement.

Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first contact Child Maintenance Options. Child Maintenance Options provides free, 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 how much child maintenance should be paid. Some parents will then arrange the payments between themselves: this service is known as Direct Pay.

If parents cannot arrange payments between themselves, or if the Paying Parent does not keep up with the payments, the Receiving Parent can ask the Child Maintenance Service to switch the case to the Collect & Pay service. This service collects and manages payments between the parents, including recovery of unpaid maintenance that built up under the Direct Pay service. This could involve the use of enforcement powers. To use the Collect & 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

The Child Maintenance Service was launched in stages:

Stage 1 – 10/12/12 - The service was opened to new applicants with at least 4 children.

Stage 2 – 29/07/13 – New applications were open to parents with at least 2 children.

Stage 3 – 25/11/13 – The service was opened to all applications.

The quarterly Child Maintenance Statistics, published on gov.uk, provide information from stage 2 to the present day. Prior to this, the numbers of applications was small and limited performance data was available.

The latest release of statistics contains information, from the start of 2015 to the present day, for Great Britain.

Definitions and Terminology

Appeals: Parents who have made an appeal to the Child Maintenance Service or Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service 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 are 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 purpose 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: Parents can report 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 & Pay: The Child Maintenance Service collects and manages payments from the Paying Parent to the Receiving Parent. If required, the Child Maintenance service will take enforcement actions.

Compliance: If the parents are using the Collect & Pay service and the paying parent has paid some child maintenance in the last three months then they are considered to be compliant.

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

Domestic Abuse: A wide range of threatening, abusive, controlling or violent behaviours. It can include emotional and financial abuse, as well as physical or sexual violence.

Enforcement: When a paying parent using the Collect & 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:

- **Deduction from Earnings Order / Request** - the Child Maintenance Service can instruct a Paying Parent's employer to deduct child maintenance from the Paying Parent's earnings.
- **Deduction Order** - the Child Maintenance Service may recover Unpaid Maintenance from a Paying Parent's bank or building society account.
- **Civil Enforcement Actions** - A Paying Parent can be taken to court over unpaid maintenance. The courts can grant Liability Orders, which allow further action to be taken, such as referral to Enforcement Agents, who can seize goods in order to sell them to cover any unpaid maintenance and costs. Where the Paying Parent is a homeowner, courts can grant a Charging Order against the property which would prevent any sale without repayment of the outstanding amount. Ultimately, it would grant the power to force the sale of the property by an Order for Sale. If these methods fail, the Child Maintenance Service can apply for the courts to disqualify the parent from driving or holding 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 in the quarter. Therefore, it may include arrears from previous quarters or transferred from Direct pay, rescheduled to be collected in that 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.

Paused Applications: Prior to the closure of all ongoing Child Support Agency cases with an ongoing liability (in December 2018), an application could be paused if one of the parents had a child maintenance arrangement through the Child Support Agency which was being closed.

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 only pursues these 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
- External interest groups
- Parliament
- Department for Work and Pensions Ministers
- Ministers and officials in other Government departments
- Academics
- The media and external commentators

These statistics are used by a number of internal stakeholders for:

- Monitoring and reporting of the Child Maintenance Services performance.
- Internal analysis to help improve the Child Maintenance Services performance.
- Informing ministerial briefings and press releases.
- Answering Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests
- Policy evaluation to help external users gauge the performance of the Child Maintenance Service

Our internet-based publication means that we cannot ascertain all the varied uses of the numbers produced. However, we do know these statistics are used for:

- Providing general information on the Child Maintenance Service in Great Britain
- Measuring performance of the child maintenance scheme
- Informing discussions and meetings with external stakeholders and MPs
- Social research and academic studies of the impact of social policy

Data Quality and Sources

Data Sources

The statistics in the publication come from different data sources. Some of these are from administrative data, management information and some from Clerical data. We have ensured that all our tables are based on the most accurate and relevant data available.

- **Administrative data** is generated and stored on the Child Maintenance Service computer systems. Data on all parents using the service is collected and the quality of this information is good.
- **Management information** is aggregate information and statistics collected and used by the Child Maintenance Service to manage the business, monitor performance and inform policies. It is usually based on administrative data but can also come from survey data. The terms administrative data and management information are sometimes used interchangeably. The quality of this information is good.
- **Clerical data** 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 reasonable.

We believe all our data sources meet publishable standards.

The table below sets out the source(s) for each table

Table	Measure	Source
1	Applications to the Child Maintenance Service	Administrative Datasets
2	Application fee exemptions	Administrative Datasets
3	Intake	Administrative Datasets
4	Child Maintenance Arrangements for Paying Parents	Administrative Datasets
5	Changes to the Child Maintenance Service Arrangements	Administrative Datasets
6	How much child maintenance are Paying Parents paying?	Administrative Datasets
7	Paying Parents Compliance	Administrative Datasets
8	Money Due and Paid each Quarter	Administrative Datasets
9	How much child maintenance the Child Maintenance Service has arranged	Management Information
10	Children Covered by the Child Maintenance Service	Administrative Datasets
11	Enforcement Actions	Administrative and Clerical data.
12	Financial Investigations Unit Actions	Management Information
13	Shared care	Administrative Datasets
14	Change of Circumstances	Administrative Datasets
15	Mandatory Reconsiderations	Administrative Datasets
16	Appeals	Management Information
17	Complaints	Management Information
18	Telephony	Management Information

Arrangements, Paying Parents, and Children: Criteria for Inclusion in the Statistics

Which arrangements are included in these statistics?

In general, counts of arrangements (including applications) include all open child maintenance arrangements for which some maintenance has been arranged under 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 transferred onto the Child Maintenance Service. These arrangements are included in counts if, and only if, ongoing maintenance has been arranged by the Child Maintenance Service since the case was transferred.

Counts of arrangements (and applications) **do not** include those for which arrears that were incurred under the Child Support Agency have been transferred to the Child Maintenance Service, but no ongoing maintenance has become due under the Child Maintenance Service. However, statistics relating to other processes (e.g. enforcement actions, telephony) may, unless otherwise indicated, include processes 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 a qualifying child for the purpose of calculating ongoing maintenance, for cases in which the relevant arrangement is still open (because there are arrears or other qualifying children).

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 to statisticians 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 in Table 4 include all unique Paying Parents associated with arrangements meeting the criteria defined above.

The counts in table 7 only include Paying Parents who were due to pay some child maintenance in the relevant quarter. In this table, individual Paying Parents may be counted under both Direct Pay and Collect & Pay, because a Paying Parent may

have more than one arrangement, and these arrangements may have different service types.

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 outlined below.

- **Weekly amounts which Paying Parents were due to pay, during the month of December 2018 (Table 6).** The total number of Paying Parents was unaffected by the data problems, but the breakdown between the various liability bands was identified as being affected. Estimates were calculated using a method which leaves the total number of Paying Parents in December 2018 unchanged. For each liability band:
 - the percentage of Paying Parents falling into that liability band was calculated for the month of November 2018;
 - the percentage of Paying Parents falling into that liability band was calculated for the month of January 2019;
 - the average (mean) of the two percentages above was taken as an estimate of the percentage of Paying Parents falling into that liability band during the month of December 2018; then
 - the estimated number of Paying parents falling into that liability band for the month of December was calculated as a product of the estimated percentage (calculated above) and the total number of Paying Parents.
- **Money due and paid during the quarter ending December 2018 (Table 8).** Estimates were calculated by finding the average (mean) of a) the value arranged / paid for the quarter ending November 2018, and b) the value arranged / paid for the quarter ending January 2019. (These figures were not affected by the data problem.) This was carried out independently for the following metrics:
 - amount of Child Maintenance due through the Direct Pay service;
 - amount of Child Maintenance due through the Collect & Pay service; and
 - amount of Child Maintenance paid through the Collect & Pay service.
- **Number of Paying Parents using the Collect & Pay service with a deduction from earnings order/request (DEO/R) that were compliant, during the quarter ending December 2018 (Table 11).** The total number of Paying Parents with a DEO/R was unaffected by the data problem, but the number identified as compliant was affected. The percentage of Paying Parents with a DEO/R that were compliant was calculated for the quarter ending November 2018, and then for the quarter ending January 2019. (These figures were not affected by the data problem.) The percentage of Paying Parents with a DEO/R that were compliant for the quarter ending December 2018 was estimated as being the average (mean) of these two values. The estimated number of Paying Parents with a DEO/R that were compliant for the quarter ending December 2018 was then calculated as the product of this percentage and the total number of paying parents with a DEO/R.

- **Values collected via deduction from earnings orders/requests and civil enforcement actions (Table 11).** Estimates were calculated by finding the average (mean) of a) the value collected during the quarter ending November 2018, and b) the value collected during the quarter ending January 2019. (These figures were not affected by the data problem.) This was carried out independently for the following metrics:
 - Total money collected from Paying Parents via Deduction from Earnings Orders or Requests; and
 - Total money collected from Paying Parents using the Collect & Pay service with a deduction from earnings order/request in place or a Civil Enforcement action **N.B. this metric is no longer reported** as of the September 2019 publication (data to June 2019).

Corrections to Methodology

This section sets out methodological corrections which have resulted in earlier published statistics being systematically revised, or deemed inaccurate. Details of methodological changes prior to the September 2019 publication (data to June 2019), are outlined in the relevant release documents.

September 2019 publication (Data to June 2019):

1. There have been corrections to the methodology used to allocate arrangements (and therefore children) to service types. This affects Table 10 (Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service) and the Regional Tables. Figures for previous quarters were revised in this publication. The changes correct the following errors:

- previously, if a Paying Parent made any payments via the Collect & Pay service during a calendar quarter, all arrangements associated with that parent would have been recorded under 'Collect & Pay - Paying', even if they were using Direct Pay at the end of the quarter (due to switching services or having multiple arrangements); and
- the small number of arrangements not yet assigned to a service type were previously recorded as being covered by the Collect & Pay service.

Approximately 2% of children covered in March 2019 were miscategorised in the statistics as a result of these errors. This rises to approximately 4% for figures relating to earlier times, due to the relatively greater number of arrangements not assigned to service types.

2. Tables 4 and 6 include counts of unique Paying Parents on the Child Maintenance Service. This is calculated by counting the number of unique Paying Parent National Insurance Numbers associated with arrangements. Previously, these were sourced from datasets that were available at the relevant time (e.g. data held 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 Paying Parent associated with each arrangement. This may include subsequent updates or revisions (e.g. where the National Insurance Number of the Paying Parent was unknown at the time of reporting but has since been identified). Although there is minimal change to figures from September 2017, figures prior to this quarter have

been revised upwards by approximately 1.0%, with the exception of June 2017, which saw an upwards revision of 2.4%.

3. Counts of Civil Enforcement Actions (Liability Orders, Enforcement Agents, Sanctions, Other Civil Enforcement Actions) 'in process', provided in Table 11, previously included any action ongoing during the last month of the quarter. This now only includes actions that were ongoing at the end of the quarter.

4. Counts of liability orders applied for, granted, and withdrawn/dismissed, provided in Table 11, now include liability orders relating to arrangements consisting solely of arrears accrued under the Child Support Agency. This is consistent with data provided elsewhere in Table 11.

5. Table 11 previously included statistics on the total amount of maintenance collected from parents undergoing a Civil Enforcement Actions or with a Deduction from Earnings Order / Request applied. Following a review of this table, these figures are no longer considered fit for purpose due to the following methodological issues which cannot easily be fixed:

- Money collected towards the payment of arrears accrued under the Child Support Agency was not included, as is the case with other figures in the table.
- The reported figure counted any money collected during the quarter, from paying parents who had an ongoing enforcement action or Deduction from Earnings Order / Request at the end of the quarter. This means that some payments may have been inappropriately included or excluded.

6. The information source used to produce Deduction from Earning Order / Request statistics in Table 11 has been changed, to ensure figures are aligned with internal reports. Changes to published figures are minimal: zero or one rounding unit (100).

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: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/methodologytopicsandstatisticalconcepts/guidetoexperimentalstatistics>

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 cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk

Useful links

Previous Releases

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics>

For information and statistics on Child Maintenance Options and family-based arrangements please see the quarterly survey results of parents who speak to Child Maintenance Options: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics>

Further information and statistics on the performance and closure of the Child Support Agency can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-support-agency-quarterly-summary-statistics--2>

Annex

Child Maintenance Service Overview

