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Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

Guidance

# Child Maintenance Service statistics: background information and methodology

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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](#).

## 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 and 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 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**

The Child Maintenance Service was launched in stages:

Stage 1 – 10 December 2012 – the service was opened to new applicants with at least 4 children.

Stage 2 – 29 July 2013 – new applications were open to parents with at least 2 children.

Stage 3 – 25 November 2013 – 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 and 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 and Pay service and the paying parent has paid some child maintenance in the last 3 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 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:

- 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

This 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**

This 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**

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 reasonable.

We believe all our data sources meet publishable standards.

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

<b>Table</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Source</b>
1	Applications to the Child Maintenance Service	Administrative datasets
2	Application fee exemptions	Administrative datasets
3	Intake	Administrative datasets
4	The number of paying parents and their Child Maintenance Arrangements	Administrative datasets
5	Service Type changes	Administrative datasets
6	Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service	Administrative datasets
7	Shared care	Administrative datasets
8	How much Child Maintenance were paying parents due to pay?	Administrative datasets
9	Paying parents Compliance	Administrative datasets
10	Money Due and Paid each Quarter	Administrative datasets
11	How much Child Maintenance the Child Maintenance Service has arranged	Management information
12	Enforcement Actions	Administrative and clerical data
13	Financial Investigations Unit – actions	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 (for example, 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 9 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 and 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 8)**

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 10)**

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

**Number of paying parents using the Collect and Pay service with a deduction from earnings order/request (DEO/R) that were compliant, during the quarter ending December 2018 (Table 12)**

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 12)**

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
- total money collected from paying parents using the Collect and Pay service with a deduction from earnings order/request in place or a civil enforcement action. Note: 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 6 (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 and Pay service during a calendar quarter, all arrangements associated with that parent would have been recorded under 'Collect and Pay – Paying', even if they were using Direct Pay at the end of the quarter (due to switching services or having multiple arrangements)
- the small number of arrangements not yet assigned to a service type were previously recorded as being covered by the Collect and 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 8 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 (for example, 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 (for example, 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 12, 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 12, 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 12.

5. Table 12 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 12 has been changed, to ensure figures are aligned with internal reports. Changes to published figures are minimal: zero or one rounding unit (100).

### **December 2019 publication (Data to September 2019)**

1. The release document is now published in a webpage (HTML) format, rather than as a PDF. There are number of benefits to this: the new format is intended to be more accessible, and easier to read on portable devices.
2. Previously reported counts of paying parents, children, and arrangements (in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 8) have undergone small revisions. This is because one of our data sources did not previously contain full information relating to the specific subset of cases where Child Maintenance arrangements were applied for and created under the Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service but have subsequently moved to the service in Great Britain. This has now been corrected. The impact of this change varies depending on the time period being reported, but impacts no more than 0.2% of the caseload at any time.
3. 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. The order of tables and the numbering scheme has changed so that tables relating to the same theme are now grouped together.

## **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: [cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk)

## Useful links

Read [previous releases](#).

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](#).

Read further information and statistics on the [performance and closure of the Child Support Agency](#).

## Annex: Child Maintenance Service overview

### Family-based arrangement

Are private ways to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. They can be regular 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 under 19 years old or they declare they have 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 charge and the receiving parent has a 4% reduction on their payment.

## **Maintenance**

Arrangements move onto 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.

View a flow chart of the [Child Maintenance Service overview](#).

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