



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Effective Family-based Child Maintenance Arrangements following contact with Child Maintenance Options

Background information and methodology

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## Purpose of the statistics

This document provides information on the regular quarterly survey and annual longitudinal surveys of child maintenance outcomes for Child Maintenance Options (Options) clients.

### 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 (CMS), which replaces the Child Support Agency (CSA), is for when the parents can't agree to a family-based arrangement. The Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount that should be paid. It can also collect the money from the paying parents.

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.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) monitors the number of effective arrangements facilitated by Options. This provides a measure of the efficacy of the child maintenance reforms in 2012. This document provides further information on the findings.

### Purpose

The quarterly statistics allow people to see how many children are benefiting from effective child maintenance arrangements and the type of arrangement after contacting Child Maintenance Options each quarter. The annual publication gives an indication of the total number of children benefiting from effective family-based arrangements after contact with Child Maintenance Options since the service began.

The figures are used for analysis by Child Maintenance Options and DWP to help identify issues and improve client service. The statistics support DWP's obligation to answer parliamentary questions and respond to Freedom of Information requests.

## Source

The data is collected through telephone surveys every quarter. Parents who have called Child Maintenance Options are called back at least two months later and asked about their child maintenance arrangements. The two month waiting period is to allow parents time to set up an arrangement.

Several months later, the people surveyed in the first three quarters of the year are called again to see if their arrangement has changed. This is the annual longitudinal survey. The publication of that survey also includes the final quarterly survey of the year.

Clients are selected for contact using a stratified sampling method. This is where DWP makes sure that the sample includes the right proportions of callers for each month, type of customer (those who have previously dealt with the CSA and those who have not), and the right numbers of different types of calls (inbound or outbound).

Survey	Client contact with Child Maintenance Options	Clients Surveyed
Quarter 1	February to April	June
Quarter 2	May to July	September
Quarter 3	August to October	December
Quarter 4	November to January	March
Annual	February to January	March

## Limitations

To calculate the total number of children benefiting from effective family-based arrangements after contact with Options, the results from surveying clients are combined with figures from previous years. Each part of the calculation will have its own survey error associated with it, so the final figure will be an approximation.

There are three main limitations to the results:

1. A large proportion of Options clients refuse to take part in the survey. Therefore non-response bias in the results is a concern.
2. Child Maintenance Options agents are provided with interviewer training by DWP but they are not classed as professional survey interviewers.
3. Certain Options clients are removed from the survey sample for practical reasons.
  - Non-English speakers.
  - Domestic Violence Cases.
  - Clients who have not given permission to use their survey results.

- Clients who have not declared any type of child maintenance arrangement.
- Clients who have not declared the number of children the arrangement applies to.

## Definitions and Terminology

A child maintenance arrangement is **Effective** if the three criteria below are satisfied:

- a. The parent surveyed receives/pays some or all of the money they are supposed to receive/pay.
- b. The child maintenance is usually or always paid on time.
- c. The parent believes the arrangement is working fairly well or very well.

A non-financial arrangement is effective if the parent believes it is working fairly well or very well.

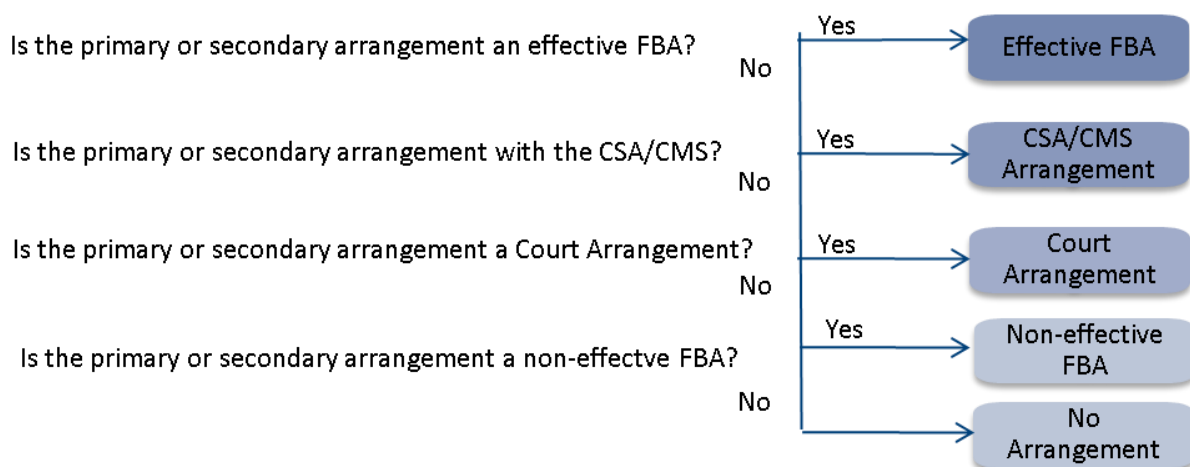
A child maintenance arrangement is considered to be **Working Well** if the parent believes the arrangement is working fairly well or very well.

**Child maintenance arrangements after Options** are arrangements that were set up or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options.

**Other child maintenance arrangements** are arrangements made prior to contact with Child Maintenance Options that have not changed since contact with Options.

**Children benefiting** is the number of children covered by an effective child maintenance arrangement.

A parent may have multiple Child Maintenance arrangements. To avoid double counting, only a parent's primary or secondary arrangement are considered and the following hierarchy is applied.



This is used to calculate the proportions of different arrangements. However, to calculate totals, like the number of children whose parents have an effective family-based arrangement, up to two arrangements per parent are counted.

For the annual calculation of the total number of effective family-based arrangements, the following procedure is used:

1. The stock from the previous year is adjusted using the Decay Rate (the percentage of effective family-based arrangements that break down or become ineffective each year). The Decay Rate is based on previous longitudinal surveys of parents with a child maintenance arrangement. 15.5% of arrangements were found to break down or become ineffective each year.
2. The estimates for the reporting year are added to the remaining stock. These are the estimates based on the annual survey, in which respondents from the first three quarterly surveys are called again, and clients from the fourth quarter are called once.

The calculation of the total number of children goes as follows:

1. The number of children benefiting in the previous year's publication is adjusted using the aforementioned Decay Rate
2. The number of children estimated to be benefiting from new or changed effective family-based arrangements is added to this.

## Revisions to the statistics

Following a change in the definition of "effectiveness", the estimates from the years up to 2012/2013 have been recalculated using the 'Effectiveness Factor'. This is calculated by averaging the percentage change between using the stricter and original definitions of effectiveness. This is 95.57%.

The number of effective Family-based arrangements after contact with Options as of the end of March 2015 (116,700) differs from figures in previous publications. This is due to an error in the 2013 and 2014 reports. Estimates for those years have been recalculated, with details in **Table 3** in the Data Tables for the annual publication in March 2016:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-preliminary-estimates-march-2016>.

For the 2016/2017 reporting year, the methodology has been updated. Weightings were Estimates for the years 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 were recalculated to bring them in line with the methodology used for the year 2016/2017. All revised figures are published in **Table 1** and **Table 4** of the tables document for March 2017:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-data-to-march-2017>.

# 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>

## Quality Statement

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority and are new official statistics. Users are invited to comment on the development and relevance of these 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.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cm.analysis.research@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

# Useful links

Previous Releases

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

How we plan to evaluate child maintenance reform:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/387584/child-maintenance-reforms-evaluation-strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387584/child-maintenance-reforms-evaluation-strategy.pdf)

The Child Maintenance Options website has further information on their work:

<http://www.cmoptions.org/>