Department for Work & Pensions
Fact sheet

Official Statistics

Child Support Agency quarterly summary of statistics: data to September 2020 (experimental)

Published 27 January 2021

This is the latest release of statistics on the Child Support Agency, to September 2020. The release includes revisions to previously published statistics.

The next release is planned for April 2021.

1. Introduction

The Child Support Agency (CSA) was set up in 1993 and in 2012 the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) was created to replace the CSA. The closure of the CSA caused a number of ongoing statistics have ended and all cases held on the CSA IT systems have been closed or transferred to the CMS. Some cases have been closed but have been transferred to the CSA schemes. These remaining cases have been moved into the CMS IT system. This remaining debt is being enforced by differing a final chance at collection when it is cost effective to do so. This is a non-statutory stage, as outlined in the child maintenance compliance and enforcement strategy.

Effect of COVID-19

This publication covers data up to the quarter ending September 2020. During this period, the Child Support Agency (CSA) and the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) adjusted and the required changes to the Department's operational priorities. In the UK, the lockdown began on 23 March 2020. Various regional and national restrictions continued throughout 2020.

2. Main Stories

The number of CSA cases held on CMS IT systems decreased from 75,000 in June 2019 to 71,700 in September 2020. The caseload decreased, but remained broadly stable since June 2019 and is now at its lowest level since the CMS was created. This caseload is due to the closure of cases as outlined in the child maintenance compliance and enforcement strategy, and the transfer of cases from the CSA to the CMS.

The CSA historical debt balance continues to reduce. The amount of CSA debt held on CMS IT systems has decreased from £440.1 million in June 2020 to £429.7 million in September 2020. The outstanding debt balance has been steadily declining since the beginning of the CMS, and is now at its lowest level since the CMS was created. The government will debt which has no reasonable chance of being collected is written off.

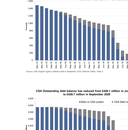
Between 13 December 2019, when the compliance and arrears strategy work started, and September 2020:

- the CSA has written off 292,200 parents with care to a final chance of collection
- 29,300 cases with no payments made in the last 6 years have been closed, and 16,600 were analysed to see if they qualified for the payment scheme or to be closed with no further action
- collection of arrears is either complete or in process for 29,200 of the 36,300 case in analysis and parents have received a final chance letter but still have not transferred debt collection stage
- 379,400 cases with no payments made in the last year and the debt under £500 have been closed and transferred to CMS IT system. system records showed this cases had a total debt of £31.8 million, of which £20.2 million was owed to the government only.

CSA caseload has declined from 75,000 in June 2019 to 71,700 in September 2020

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 1.

CSA Outstanding debt balance has reduced from £480.1 million in June 2020 to £429.7 million in September 2020



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 1.

3. What you need to know

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

The parent with care (PWC) is the parent with the main day to day care of the children. The non-resident parent (NRP) is the parent who does not have day to day care of the children.

Some CSA historical debt balances are adjusted either because the debt has already been paid, or was created in error. Some CSA historical debt is written off because it is cost ineffective to do so. Some debt is not due to be paid this debt or did not respond to the child maintenance service. Some debt is also found to be related to a benefit and so it has been deemed uncollectable.

Representation is the process of writing to parents to ask if they want us to make a last attempt at collecting the debt owed to them, where it is cost effective to do so.

This publication covers CSA child maintenance cases which have historical debt held on CMS IT systems. The CMS IT systems are used to collect and pay child maintenance. The CTS computer system is used to the closure of CSA systems. It does not cover cases which originated in the Child Maintenance Service.

Compliance and Arrears Strategy

The child maintenance compliance and arrears strategy sets out how government will collect and pay child maintenance. Since December 2019, the CSA and CMS have sent to the PWC to see if they want what is deemed to be made to try to collect their other cases where:

- it has built up on CSA systems and there has been no recent payment made
- the case started before 1 November 2008 and the debt is over £1000 or
- the case started on or after 1 November 2008 and the debt is over £500

This process is called 'representation'. If the PWC responds stating that they still want the debt, the CMS will then write to the non-resident parent (NRP) to ask them whether there is a reasonable chance of collection and proceed appropriately. In the case where the NRP does not respond.

Cases where the debt is old and less than £1000 for later cases) will be written off. We will not ask parents in these cases if they want their debt collected, as collection activity would cost more that the debt is worth, but a notification letter will be issued to both parents to explain why we are not collecting the debt. If the non-resident parent (NRP) pays the debt will be written off and notification letters will not be issued.

All debt owed to government accrued in the CSA will be written off as collecting this debt will not benefit families and it would cost more to collect than the debt is worth. Debt owed to government built up under a CMS group that has now ended. This policy is enabling the NRP to repay the government for some of the benefit paid to support their children.

4. Parent with care representation process on CSA Systems

In cases where we offer the PWC the chance to ask for collection of the debt owed to them the CSA, or CMS if the case has been moved onto the CMS IT system, will write to the NRP to ask if collection is cost effective. If the NRP responds stating that they still owe the debt owed to them to be pursued. If the PWC asks for the debt to be pursued, we will perform a number of checks to establish whether there is reasonable chance of collection before we pursue the debt. If the NRP does not respond to the letter, the debt does not respond within 60 days of the first letter, or the case is deemed as having little chance of successful collection the debt will be written off.

In total,225,800 cases have started the representation process.

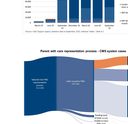
Of the 143,700 cases that have completed the process:

- 44,200 cases (31%) are were unable to trace the PWC
- 32,900 cases (2%) were unable to progress because the NRP is deceased
- 14,900 (10%) cases were unable to trace the NRP and of these cases, 1,500 (1%) were unable to progress because the NRP is deceased
- 41,700 (29%) cases parents have arrived at an informal collection of the debt owed - these cases have progressed into the non-resident parent representation process (see Table 11 and 12 of the tables below)
- 9,000 (6%) cases parents have arrived at a decision that they do not want to collect the debt, or have not responded to the letter or reminder letter within 60 days of the first letter.

Overall, 143,700 cases (31,700) who have completed the PWC representation process on the CSA systems (when an attempt to be made to collect their debt)

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 11.

Parent with care representation process – Closing position for CSA system cases



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 12.

Parent with care representation process on CMS Systems

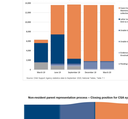
In cases where we offer the PWC the chance to ask for collection of the debt owed to them the CSA, or CMS if the case has been moved onto the CMS IT system, will write to the NRP to ask if collection is cost effective. If the NRP responds stating that they still owe the debt owed to them to be pursued. If the PWC asks for the debt to be pursued, we will perform a number of checks to establish whether there is reasonable chance of collection before we pursue the debt. If the NRP does not respond to the letter, the debt does not respond within 60 days of the first letter, or the case is deemed as having little chance of successful collection the debt will be written off.

In total,225,800 cases have started the representation process.

Of the 143,700 cases that have completed the process:

- 44,200 cases (31%) are were unable to trace the PWC
- 32,900 cases (2%) were unable to progress because the NRP is deceased
- 14,900 (10%) cases were unable to trace the NRP and of these cases, 1,500 (1%) were unable to progress because the NRP is deceased
- 41,700 (29%) cases parents have arrived at an informal collection of the debt owed - these cases have progressed into the non-resident parent representation process (see Table 11 and 12 of the tables below)
- 9,000 (6%) cases parents have arrived at a decision that they do not want to collect the debt, or have not responded to the letter or reminder within 60 days of the first letter.

To date, 17,700 cases (4%) have started the PWC representation process on the CMS computer system where it has not attempted to be made to collect their debt



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 11.

Parent with care representation process – CMS system cases

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 12.

5. Non-resident parent representation process

In cases where the PWC responds asking for the debt to be collected, the CSA, or CTS if the case has been moved onto the CTS IT system, performs a number of checks to establish whether there is reasonable chance of collection before we pursue the debt. The NRP is sent for payment of the debt. If the NRP is unable to pay the debt in full, the case is transferred for on-going attempts to collect the money owed. When the case is deemed as having little chance of successful collection the debt is written off.

Non-resident parent representation process on CSA systems

Accurate held on CSA systems and eligible for representation had completed the non-resident parent representation process by the end of March 2020.

See Table 5, 7, 13, 14 and 15 of the national tables for full data.

As at March 2020:

60,100 cases have completed the non-resident parent representation process. Of these cases:

- 21,200 (7%) cases are were unable to trace the NRP
- 41,400 (43%) cases are were unable to progress for another reason such as a deceased non-resident, the debt is deemed uncollectable or the NRP is deceased
- 22,500 (38%) cases we have written to the NRP and of these cases
- 17,000 (27%) cases parents have arrived at an informal collection of the debt owed - these cases have progressed into the non-resident parent representation process
- 4,900 400,000(6%) cases parents have either had a final chance letter to collect the debt, or have not responded to the letter or reminder letter within 60 days of the first letter.
- 31,000 (5%) cases the NRP was identified as deceased after the letter was sent
- 10,000 (2%) cases we were unable to trace the PWC after the letter was issued
- 28,400 (12%) cases are still within the time limit to respond.

Overall, 10,700 cases on CSA systems have completed the NRP representation process

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 13.

Non-resident parent representation process – Closing position for CSA system cases

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 14.

Non-resident parent representation process on CMS systems

17,800 cases held on CMS systems and eligible for representation had started the non-resident parent representation process by the end of March 2020.

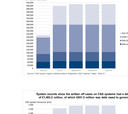
See Table 11, 12, 16 and 17 of the national tables for full data.

As at September 2020, of the 17,800 cases that have started the process:

- 10,000 (56%) cases are were unable to trace the NRP
- 2,000 (11%) cases are were unable to progress for another reason such as a deceased non-resident, the debt is deemed uncollectable or the NRP is deceased
- 1,000 (6%) cases we have written to the NRP and of these cases
- 1,000 (6%) cases parents have arrived at an informal collection of the debt balance before the formal the representation
- 11,800 (66%) cases have been transferred to the CMS system for on-going attempts to collect the debt

See Table 6 of the national tables for information about debt collection activity.

To date, 14,700 cases on CMS systems have completed the NRP representation process



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 15.

Non-resident parent representation process – CMS system cases

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 17.

6. CSA debt written off

The Child Support Agency has written off historical debt on 576,600 cases. 415,400 cases were written off CSA systems and 159,200 cases were written off CMS systems. These cases had system records showing a total debt value of £1,302.2 million. £1,483.2 million from cases held on CSA systems and £183.3 million from cases held on CMS systems.

CSA debt written off on CSA systems

As of March 2020, there were 415,400 Child Support Agency cases held on CSA systems which have had their historical arrears adjusted or written off since the start of the compliance and arrears strategy on 13 December 2019. These 415,400 cases had system records showing a total debt value of £1,482.2 million. Of these:

- 65,200 (17%) cases had system records showing debt which was owed to government only with a total value of £20.3 million
- 58,300 (14%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents of £0 or less (overpaid) with a total value of £0.0 million
- 174,400 (42%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents of £500-£1,000 or less (depending on the start date of the case) with a total value of £0.0 million
- 118,300 (28%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents which was more than £1000-£1,000 (depending on the start date of the case) with a total value of £1,462.0 million. Some of this debt may be uncollectable, but it is not cost effective to do so to collect this. The debt has been adjusted for corrections or production of evidence that payment has been made, or the debt has been deemed uncollectable

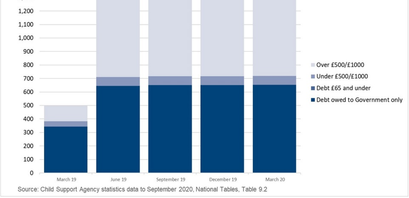
Accurate held on CSA systems and eligible for representation have completed the non-resident parent representation process. See Table 21 and 22 of the national tables for full data.

415,400 cases on CSA systems have had their historical debt written off

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 21.

System records show the written off cases on CSA systems had a debt value of £1,482.2 million, of which £20.3 million is owed to government

Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, Internal Tables, Table 22.



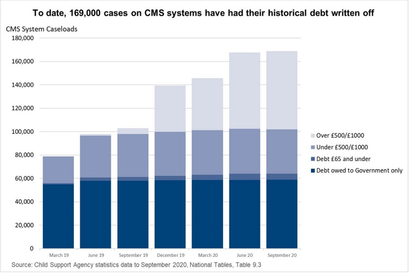
Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, National Tables, Table 9.2

CSA debt written off on CMS systems

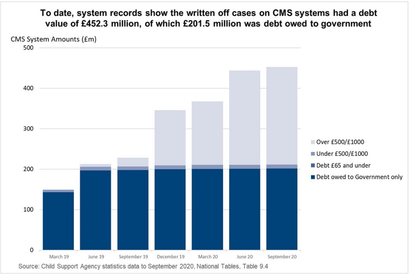
As of September 2020, there were 169,000 Child Support Agency cases held on CMS IT systems which have had their historical arrears adjusted or written off since the start of the compliance and arrears programme activity on 13 December 2018. These cases had system records showing a total debt value of £452.3 million. Of these:

- 58,900 (35%) cases had system records showing debt which was owed to government only with a total value of £201.5 million
- 5,200 (3%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents of £65 or under with a total value of £0.1 million
- 37,900 (22%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents of £500/£1,000 or less (depending on the start date of the case) with a total value of £9.5 million
- 67,000 (40%) cases had system records showing debt owed to parents which was more than £500/£1,000 (depending on the start date of the case) with a total value of £241.2 million – in these cases, either we were unable to trace the PWC, the PWC did not ask for the debt to be collected, the debt has been adjusted due to corrections or production of evidence that payment has been made, or the debt has been deemed uncollectable

Some cases which are eligible for representation have not yet completed the process, Read more detail about PWC representation. See Table 9.3 and 9.4 of the national tables for full data.



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, National Tables, Table 9.3



Source: Child Support Agency statistics data to September 2020, National Tables, Table 9.4

7. About these statistics

Caseload figures contained within this publication are rounded to the nearest hundred or percent. Amounts are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand. These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority.

The statistics have been produced using new data and a new methodology which is still subject to on-going development and testing and they may therefore be revised in future publications. For this reason, they are badged as experimental statistics. Always refer to the most recent release for the most up to date statistics.

A number of cases had their debt adjusted prior to 13 December 2018 as part of the case closure programme. These adjustments were reported in the Child Support Agency case closure statistics.

8. Where to find out more

Find more information relating to Child Support Agency cases, available via the National Data Tables

Read previous releases of these statistics.

Read information relating to the Child Support Agency case closure statistics.

Read guidance on the compliance and arrears strategy.

Read the consultation outcome of the compliance and arrears strategy.

Some statistics on debt that has been transferred from the CSA to the Child Maintenance Service are sourced from the 1993 and 2003 Child Maintenance Schemes Client Funds Accounts.

Read statistics on the performance of the Child Maintenance Service.

Read details on child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to the Child Maintenance Options service, including family based arrangements.

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Feedback is welcome, send comments to: cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk

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