

Survey of child maintenance options outcomes

November 2012

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Summary

1. The Child Maintenance Group's¹ primary objective is to ensure that the maximum number of children who live apart from one or both parents benefit from an effective maintenance arrangement.
2. Child Maintenance Options' contribution to this objective has been measured through surveys of clients who used the service between July 2008 and January 2012. The latest surveys were conducted in January 2012 and late March / early April 2012.
3. The survey results show that by the end of March 2012 an estimated 140,000 children were benefiting in 89,000 effective family-based maintenance arrangements made or changed following contact between a parent and Child Maintenance Options. More detailed results are in Annex A.

Effective family-based arrangements and children benefiting - March 2012		
Arrangements made or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options		
		95% confidence interval
Family-based arrangements	89,000	+/- 6,000
Children benefiting	140,000	+/- 12,000

Survey results from a representative sample of 5,179 Child Maintenance Options clients in contact with the service between July 2008 (when the service began) and January 2012.

Survey results weighted to Child Maintenance Options client population totals.

Background

4. Currently the Child Maintenance Group's performance against its primary objective is measured in two parts – the number of children benefiting from:

¹ The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission was the body responsible for delivering child maintenance up until 1st August, 2012. The Child Maintenance Group (CMG), within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), now manages the child maintenance system in Great Britain.

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- Family-based arrangements put into place following contact between a parent and the Child Maintenance Options service;
 - Arrangements made through the Child Support Agency (CSA)
5. For 2009/10 the number of children benefiting following contact with Child Maintenance Options was measured by a survey conducted by BMRB, an external research company. Since then measurement has been through surveys conducted in-house.
 6. To monitor operational effectiveness, regular quarterly surveys of Child Maintenance Options clients have been conducted since the service started in July 2008. The methodology and the survey questionnaire used for these surveys formed the basis for the 2010/11 and 2011/12 year end survey designs, with revisions designed to ensure close alignment with the BMRB survey / measurement.
 7. The fieldwork was carried out by Capita, partners in the Child Maintenance Options service, under the supervision of the Child Maintenance Group Research Team. The results reported here were produced by the Child Maintenance Group Analytical Team.

Estimating children benefiting at end March 2012

8. Estimates of the number of children benefiting at end March 2012 were derived by combining results from a number of different survey components:-
 - A longitudinal survey of respondents who were interviewed for the second or third time in January 2012 following their contact with Child Maintenance Options. These respondents had initially been in contact with Child Maintenance Options between July 2008 and July 2011.
 - A 'top up' survey of respondents who had been in contact with Child Maintenance Options from August 2010 to July 2011. These respondents were interviewed about their child maintenance arrangements for the first time in January 2012.
 - Surveys of Child Maintenance Options callers conducted in January 2012 and April 2012 covering callers in the quarters from August 2011 to October 2011 and November 2011 to January 2012 respectively.
9. The final combined achieved sample is shown in Annex B, alongside the number of uniquely identified Child Maintenance Options clients.

Children benefiting definition

10. The main objective of the research was to measure:
 - The number of children, by March 31st 2012, who are benefiting from effective family-based arrangements put in place following (or before but changed since) parental contact with the Child Maintenance Options service.
11. An effective family-based arrangement is for these purposes defined as either:
 - A regular financial arrangement where at least some of the agreed amount is always/usually received on time and/or where the arrangement is working very/fairly well.
 - Or an ad hoc arrangement, which includes a financial element (or transaction in kind) and is considered to be working very/fairly well.

Child Maintenance Options client population

12. Child Maintenance Options clients are mostly separated parents, occasionally family members, friends or other interested parties. While no personal information is available on website users, the vast majority of other Child Maintenance Options clients do provide their contact details. This means that the population for sampling purposes is defined as:
 - All users of Child Maintenance Options who either call or are called by the service.
13. Inbound calls to the service are almost exclusively by parents who are proactively seeking information on their child maintenance options, whereas outbound calls are mainly calls to lone parent benefit applicants who have agreed with Jobcentre Plus to be referred to Child Maintenance Options.
14. To allow enough time for arrangements to be put in place, clients whose first contact was less than two months prior to the interview dates are not included.
15. The effective population for end of March 2012 reporting purposes is therefore restricted to individuals whose first contact with Child Maintenance Options was between July 2008 (when the service began) and end January 2012. A total of 592,000 uniquely identified individuals called or were called by the service between these dates.
16. While this means that some clients who do make arrangements quickly following their contact with Child Maintenance Options are not counted, this will be at least partly compensated for by the inclusion of some arrangements, effective at the time of interview, which may have broken down by the end of March 2012 reporting date.

Survey sample

17. The longitudinal sample was taken from records of previous survey respondents who had given permission to be contacted again. This included callers between July 2008 and July 2011 stratified by month of call and whether the call was inbound or outbound. The reason for introducing a longitudinal element was twofold:
 - It has become increasingly difficult to obtain a representative sample of clients going back as far as July 2008 by 'cold calling'.
 - It would enable us to estimate the flows into and out of arrangements over time.
18. To ensure sufficient sample coverage by month of call and inbound/outbound, a top-up sample of callers between August 2010 and July 2011 was also selected and worked where insufficient responses were achieved from the longitudinal element.
19. Callers between August 2011 and January 2012 were surveyed in two separate quarterly surveys conducted in January and April 2012 respectively. For these quarterly surveys stratified random samples were also selected, again with stratification according to month of call and whether the call was inbound or outbound.
20. The basis for the stratification is analysis of previous survey results which show distinct differences in proportions with arrangements over time and depending on whether the call is inbound or outbound.
21. Capita was given interview targets by month of call and call type to ensure the achieved sample was representative of the overall Child Maintenance Options client base. For reporting purposes, the survey responses were weighted according to call type and date, eliminating minor variations from the stratification targets.
22. A number of categories of calls were excluded for practical purposes: those of short duration, where the client's first language is not English, where the caller is not the parent of the child etc.

Survey questionnaire

23. The survey questionnaire was focused on providing the information necessary to measure children benefiting under the current definition of an effective arrangement. Therefore, contextual and qualitative questions regarding respondents' circumstances such as those covered in the original 2010 BMRB survey were not included.
24. The questions covering arrangements and children were aligned as closely as possible to the BMRB survey and previous in-house surveys.

Survey fieldwork

25. Fieldwork was carried out by Capita under the management and supervision of the CMG Research Team. Capita staff received training in interviewing techniques by our social researchers, who also closely supervised Capita interviewers throughout the interview process, providing support and advice as well as quality assurance – both on the conduct of the interviews and the accurate recording of the information obtained.
26. The first stage of fieldwork was carried out in early January 2012 when clients for the longitudinal, top-up and January quarterly survey categories were all interviewed. The second stage consisted of the April 2012 quarterly survey of clients in contact between November 2011 and January 2012.

Estimating the number of effective arrangements and children benefiting

27. Each respondent was asked about:-
 - their parenting role – non-resident parent, parent with care, other;
 - their maintenance arrangements – family-based, court/consent order, CSA, no arrangement, reconciled;
 - when their arrangements were set up – before or after Child Maintenance Options contact;
 - whether their arrangements had been changed since contact with Child Maintenance Options;
 - the number of children (under 16 or under 19 and in full-time non-advanced education) covered by arrangements;
 - the proportion of the agreed amounts received (all, some, none);
 - the timeliness of payments (always on time, usually on time, varies, usually late, always late);
 - how well the arrangement is working (very well, fairly well, not very well, not at all well).
28. Where there was more than one arrangement (usually because there is more than one other parent), respondents were asked to talk about the arrangement covering the youngest child first and then the arrangements for other children separately.
29. The survey data collected therefore enabled us to categorise each respondent as having or not having an effective maintenance arrangement and identify the number of children for each respondent who were benefiting.

30. Grossing these results to the total population of Child Maintenance Options clients (with weights stratified by call type and month of call), provided the headline estimates for the number of effective family-based arrangements and the number of children benefiting.

Sampling variance and confidence intervals

31. The population sampled consists of all users of Child Maintenance Options who either call or are called by the service. Therefore the variance in the proportion of effective arrangements in this population can be estimated directly from the sample using standard calculation.
32. However when it comes to the proportion of children benefiting, an extra layer of sampling variation is present. This is because, while the sampling observations are parents, the units of interest are their children. To account for this extra variation the jack-knifing technique has been used to estimate the variance in the true proportion of interest.
33. Applying the estimated variances to calculate the 95% confidence intervals for the key headline figures gives the following results:
 - Effective family-based arrangements: 89,000 (+/- 6,000)
 - Children benefiting: 140,000 (+/- 12,000)

Annex A: Detailed results

Table A1: Effective family-based arrangements and children benefiting March 2012			
Arrangements made or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options			
	Inbound	Outbound	Total
Effective family-based arrangements	33,000	56,000	89,000
Children benefiting	52,000	88,000	140,000
Child Maintenance Options contacts from July 2008 to January 2012 (1)	189,000	404,000	592,000

Base: All respondents. Survey results weighted to Child Maintenance Options client population totals.

(1) Uniquely identified individuals calling or being called by Child Maintenance Options.

Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

Table A2: Child Support Agency (CSA) arrangements and children covered - March 2012			
Arrangements made or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options			
	Inbound	Outbound	Total
CSA arrangements	69,000	79,000	149,000
Children covered	120,000	172,000	292,000
Child Maintenance Options contacts from July 2008 to January 2012 (1)	189,000	404,000	592,000

Base: All respondents. Survey results weighted to Child Maintenance Options client population totals.

(1) Uniquely identified individuals calling or being called by Child Maintenance Options.

Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

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Table A3: Court arrangements and children covered - March 2012			
Arrangements made or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options			
	Inbound	Outbound	Total
Court arrangements	2,000	2,000	4,000
Children covered	3,000	3,000	7,000
Child Maintenance Options contacts from July 2008 to January 2012 (1)	189,000	404,000	592,000

Base: All respondents. Survey results weighted to Child Maintenance Options client population totals.

(1) Uniquely identified individuals calling or being called by Child Maintenance Options.

Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

Table A4: When were arrangements made or changed? ¹			
Arrangements made or changed after contact with Child Maintenance Options			
	% with arrangement	% made / changed since contact with Options	% made before Options (and not changed since)
Family-based arrangements	29%	17%	11%
CSA arrangements	36%	25%	11%
Court arrangements	1.4%	0.6%	0.8%
No arrangement (1)	34%	-	-

Base: All respondents. Survey results weighted to Child Maintenance Options client population totals

(1) No arrangement includes those who were reconciled, those who weren't parents as well as those with no arrangement

Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

¹ This table is to be interpreted as follows: 17% of callers had a family-based arrangement that was made or changed since contact with Options. 11% of callers had family-based arrangements that were made before (and not changed following) contact with Options. In total, therefore, 29% of callers had a family-based arrangement (i.e. 11% + 17% - numbers do not sum due to rounding).

Annex B: Achieved sample vs. Child Maintenance Options client population totals

Table B1: Achieved sample vs. Child Maintenance Options client population totals

Month of First contact with Options	Achieved sample			Uniquely identified callers		
	Total	Inbound call	Outbound call	Total	Inbound call	Outbound call
Jul-08	47	10	37	12,679	1,902	10,777
Aug-08	45	18	27	8,219	2,044	6,175
Sep-08	43	22	21	8,759	2,561	6,198
Oct-08	50	25	25	7,388	2,574	4,814
Nov-08	42	17	25	12,786	2,814	9,972
Dec-08	46	11	35	10,568	1,963	8,605
Jan-09	87	34	53	16,421	3,626	12,795
Feb-09	77	22	55	17,590	3,351	14,239
Mar-09	78	19	59	17,690	3,579	14,111
Apr-09	85	25	60	16,162	3,437	12,725
May-09	75	29	46	17,430	4,120	13,310
Jun-09	90	32	58	18,595	4,131	14,464
Jul-09	100	29	71	19,331	5,409	13,922
Aug-09	68	28	40	15,392	4,207	11,185
Sep-09	93	56	37	19,090	6,772	12,318
Oct-09	71	43	28	15,448	4,475	10,973
Nov-09	58	26	32	13,199	4,039	9,160
Dec-09	67	27	40	9,381	3,007	6,374
Jan-10	65	38	27	18,254	8,869	9,385
Feb-10	121	92	29	19,612	11,648	7,964
Mar-10	112	83	29	19,114	12,218	6,896
Apr-10	76	54	22	12,307	6,299	6,008
May-10	78	51	27	12,155	4,927	7,228
Jun-10	74	44	30	13,948	4,966	8,982
Jul-10	69	35	34	13,647	4,968	8,679
Aug-10	141	47	94	13,166	5,120	8,046
Sep-10	141	52	89	14,452	5,512	8,940
Oct-10	122	52	70	13,854	5,689	8,165
Nov-10	138	69	69	13,329	4,966	8,363
Dec-10	148	63	85	8,610	2,805	5,805
Jan-11	195	73	122	13,640	4,715	8,925
Feb-11	113	47	66	13,374	4,343	9,031

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Mar-11	113	36	77	15,047	4,420	10,627
Apr-11	119	36	83	10,683	3,132	7,551
May-11	155	32	123	13,898	3,615	10,283
Jun-11	163	39	124	12,776	3,298	9,478
Jul-11	140	31	109	12,765	2,947	9,818
Aug-11	171	37	134	12,027	3,078	8,949
Sep-11	254	60	194	14,840	4,538	10,302
Oct-11	187	53	134	12,476	3,599	8,877
Nov-11	302	93	209	11,214	3,167	8,047
Dec-11	146	42	104	7,882	1,978	5,904
Jan-12	614	133	481	13,264	3,941	9,323
Overall	5,179	1,865	3,314	613,808	195,526	418,282

NOTE: Some months were over sampled, but minimum targets for each month inbound and outbound were met. Results were grossed to population totals by month and inbound and outbound call type.

Annex C: Longitudinal survey results

The longitudinal surveys conducted in January 2012 re-interviewed 2,843 previous survey respondents to ask them about their latest arrangement status.

The following table shows the change in primary arrangement types of the 2,433 clients who were interviewed in January 2011 and January 2012 (i.e. leaving approximately a year between interviews). The numbers below are inclusive of arrangements made before and after Options. **The key point of interest is that although a significant proportion of clients moved between different arrangement types, the overall proportion of clients in each arrangement type remained stable over the 12 month period.**

Table C1: Arrangement types of longitudinal respondents in January 2011 and January 2012

Arrangement in January 2011	Change from 2011 → 2012	2011 proportion %		Overall change from 2011 - → 2012	2012 proportion %		Change from 2011 --> 2012	Arrangement in January 2012	+/- 95% Conf. Int.
CSA (Child Support Agency arrangement)	CSA-->CSA CSA-->Court CSA-->F-BA CSA-->No arrangement	29% ¹ 0% 3% 5% ²	38%	0%	38%	29% 0% 3% 5% ²	CSA-->CSA Court-->CSA F-BA-->CSA No arrangement-->CSA	CSA	2%
Court	Court-->Court Court-->CSA Court-->F-BA Court-->No arrangement	1% 0% 1% 0%	2%	-1%	1%	1% 0% 0% 0%	Court-->Court CSA-->Court F-BA-->Court No arrangement-->Court	Court	0%
F-BA (family-based arrangement)	F-BA-->F-BA F-BA-->CSA F-BA-->Court F-BA-->No arrangement	20% 3% 0% 5%	29%	-1%	28%	20% 3% 1% 4%	F-BA-->F-BA CSA-->F-BA Court-->F-BA No arrangement-->F-BA	F-BA	2%

¹ This means that whilst 38% of callers had a CSA arrangement as their primary arrangement in January 2011, 29% had a CSA arrangement (as their primary arrangement) in January 2011 *and* January 2012 i.e. CSA → CSA.

² Whilst 38% of callers had a CSA arrangement as their primary arrangement in January 2011, 5% had no arrangement in January 2012 (i.e. CSA → no arrangement). However, as can be seen in the 'Change from 2011 → 2012' column, whilst 38% of callers had a CSA arrangement in January 2012, 5% had no arrangement in January 2011. This counterbalances the movement from CSA arrangements to no arrangements, meaning that the net movement (in this case) is 0%.

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No arrangement	No arrangement-->No arrangement	23%	32%	1%	33%	23%	No arrangement-->No arrangement CSA-->No arrangement Court-->No arrangement F-BA-->No arrangement	No arrangement	2%	
	No arrangement-->CSA	5%								5%
	No arrangement-->Court	0%								0%
	No arrangement-->F-BA	4%								5%

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The below diagram shows that of the 16% with effective family-based arrangements (F-BAs) made or changed since contact with CM Options: 8% also had an effective F-BA (made or changed since Options) in place at the time of the previous interview (12 months previously); 7% had made an effective F-BA in the past year (since the previous interview) and 6% ceased to have an effective F-BA since the previous interview. **Therefore, while there is significant movement into and out of effective F-BAs, the overall proportion with effective F-BAs has remained stable over the 12 month period.**

