

# Child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to Child Maintenance Options

Data from customers calling up to April 2019, surveyed in August 2019

Quarterly

Published: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
Great Britain

Experimental

Child Maintenance Options (Options) is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help parents make informed choices about child maintenance.

41,200 parents contacted Options between February and April 2019. The estimates in this publication are based on telephone interviews with 1,138 of those parents. We asked parents about their child maintenance arrangements and whether they were made after speaking to Options. We also asked parents if they thought their arrangements were working well.

## Main Stories

30,700  
arrangements

Of which

5,700  
were family based arrangements

82%

Between February and April 2019, **Child Maintenance Options** helped parents set up 30,700 child maintenance arrangements.

Of these 5,700 were **family-based arrangements**.

**82%** of parents with a family-based arrangement **said it worked fairly or very well**

## At a glance

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Feedback is welcome

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## What you need to know

**Child maintenance** is support between separated parents to help with the everyday costs of looking after children. **Child Maintenance Options** is a free service at initial contact that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements. If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a '**family-based arrangement**' (FBA) and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. An FBA can be regular financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element and/or transactions in kind.

**The Child Maintenance Service (CMS)**, which replaces the Child Support Agency, is for when parents cannot agree a family-based arrangement. Parents wishing to use the CMS must first speak to Child Maintenance Options (Options) who can refer them to the CMS. A **Child Maintenance Service Arrangement** includes both Collect and Pay and Direct Pay arrangements.

**Collect and Pay:** A legally binding child maintenance arrangement set up by the CMS. The CMS calculates the amount of maintenance, then collects the payment from the Paying Parent and pays it to the Receiving Parent. There are ongoing collection charges for use of the Collect and Pay service, payable by both the Paying Parent (20 per cent on top of the maintenance amount), and the Receiving Parent (4 per cent taken out of the amount of maintenance). Collect & Pay is generally used in circumstances such as: (i) where the Paying Parent has failed to pay maintenance or failed to stick to a Direct Pay arrangement; or (ii) where one parent does not want the other to know their personal details.

**Direct Pay:** A legally binding child maintenance arrangement set up by the CMS, where the CMS calculates the amount of maintenance that should be paid and parents make their own arrangements for payments. The CMS simply provides the calculation and no further use of the service is required. Direct Pay can be chosen by either parent with the other's agreement. A £20 application fee is charged for this service (unless waived because of a domestic abuse issue). Neither parent pays collections fees under Direct Pay.

*For information on the performance of the Child Maintenance Service please see:*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>

### Definitions

A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A family-based arrangement that contains non regular payments or payments in kind is considered to be **functioning** if the parent surveyed believes it is working fairly well or very well. **Children on arrangements** means the number of children covered by the maintenance arrangement between the separated parents.

For more details see the Background Information document:

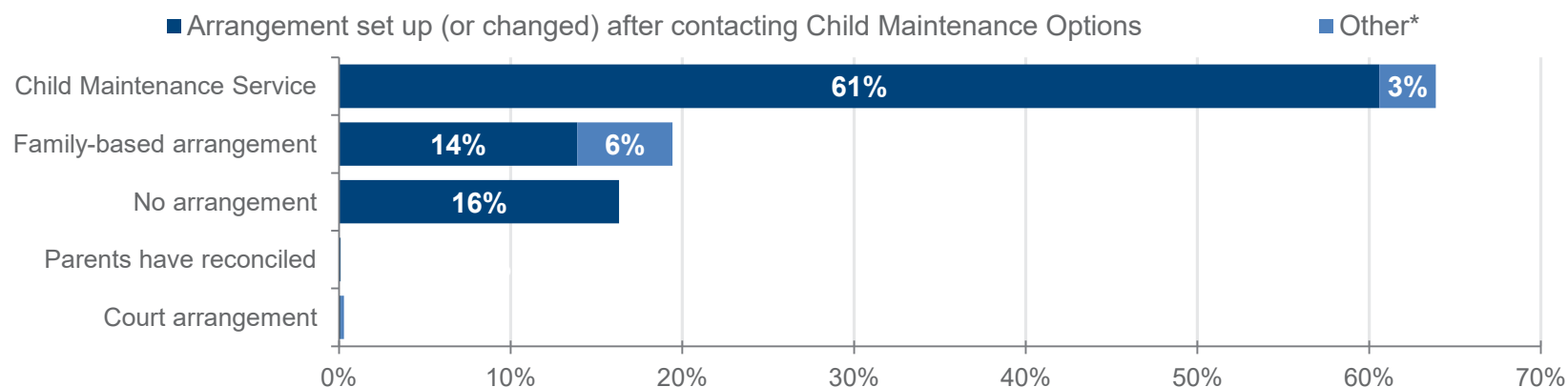
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics-background-information-and-methodology>

# Child Maintenance Arrangements<sup>1</sup>

Out of the **41,200** parents that had contact with Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019, we estimate **83%** had a child maintenance arrangement when contacted in August 2019. This represented **34,400** Child Maintenance Service (including Direct Pay and Collect and Pay), court and family-based arrangements.

## 83% of parents who contacted Options between February and April 2019 had an arrangement in August 2019

Types of child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019 and were surveyed in August 2019



Just under a fifth (**19%**)<sup>2</sup> of parents who had contacted Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019 had a family-based arrangement. **14%** set up or changed their family-based arrangement after contacting Options, while **6%** already had a family-based arrangement in place or could not remember if they set up or changed their arrangement after speaking to Options.

Not all parents with family-based arrangements will contact Child Maintenance Options so the true number of parents with family-based arrangements in society will be higher. Please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/separated-families-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2017> for details on the child maintenance arrangements of all separated families in Great Britain.

**64%** of parents who had contacted Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019 had an arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service. **61%** set up or changed their Child Maintenance Service arrangement after contacting Options, while **3%** already had a Child Maintenance Service arrangement in place or could not remember if they set up or changed their arrangement after speaking with Options.

**16%** of parents had not agreed a child maintenance arrangement after contacting Options.

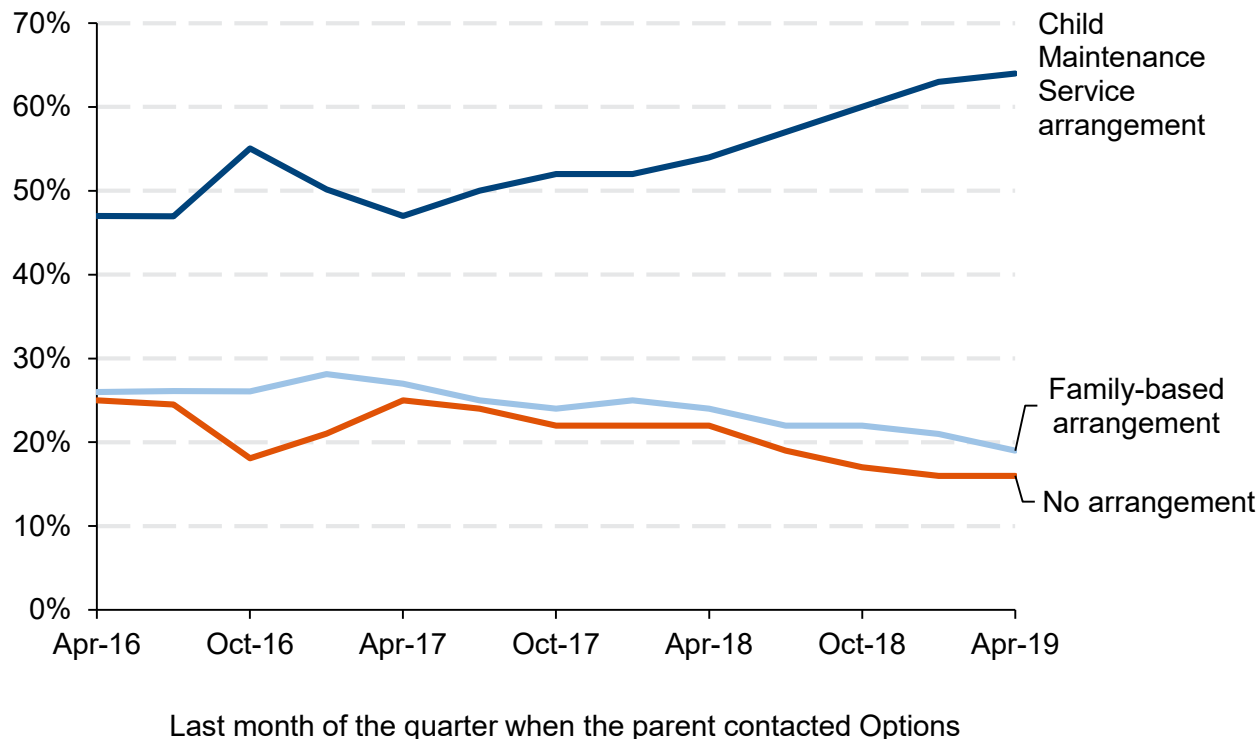
See **Table 1** (accompanying this publication) for full data.

1. Child Maintenance Service Arrangements includes both Collect and Pay and Direct Pay arrangements.
2. The figures on the graph may not match the figures in Table 1 due to rounding.

# Child Maintenance Arrangements

## The percentage of parents choosing a Child Maintenance Service arrangement after speaking to Options continues to increase

Percentage of parents with no arrangement, Child Maintenance Service or family-based arrangements after contacting Options over time



The trend of more parents opting for a Child Maintenance Service arrangement continues this quarter as **64%** of parents who contacted Options in the quarter ending April 2019 reported having a Child Maintenance Service arrangement. This has increased by ten percentage points from **54%** in the quarter ending April 2018. This is a statistically significant difference.<sup>1</sup>

The percentage of parents having no arrangement after contacting Options is the same as the previous quarter, **16%**. This has decreased by six percentage points from **22%** of parents who contacted Options in the quarter ending April 2018. This is also a statistically significant difference.<sup>1</sup>

The percentage of parents with a family-based arrangement after speaking to Options continues to be on a downward trend as **19%** of parents who contacted Options in the quarter ending April 2019 reported having a family based arrangement. This has decreased by five percentage points from **24%** of parents who contacted Options in the quarter ending April 2018. This is also a statistically significant difference.<sup>1</sup>

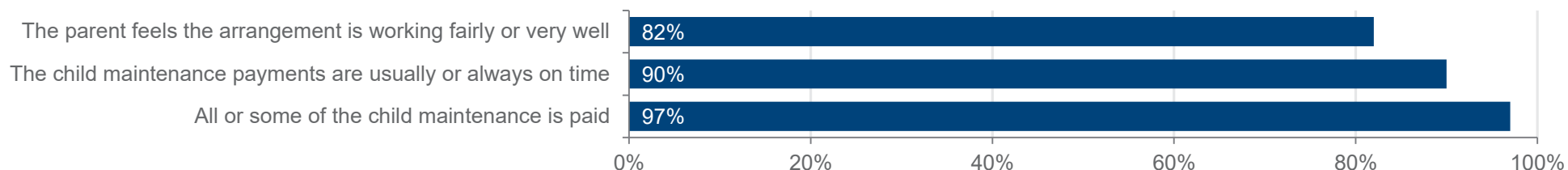
See **Table 2** (accompanying this publication) for full data.

<sup>1</sup> (see **About these statistics** at end of report for details)

## Family-based arrangements

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a **'family-based arrangement'** and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved. Family-based arrangements can be regular financial payments or flexible arrangements which may include a financial element or transactions in kind. Parents in this survey are all asked whether they feel their family-based arrangements are working well. If the arrangement involves a financial element, parents are asked whether payments are being made in part or in full, and whether they are being paid on time.

### 82% of parents with a family-based arrangement thought it worked 'fairly' or 'very well'<sup>1</sup>



#### Assessments of family-based arrangement by parents who contacted Options between February and April 2019, and were surveyed in August 2019

**82%** of parents said that their family-based arrangement was working 'very well' or 'fairly well'.

Of the parents whose family-based arrangements involved regular financial payments, **90%** said their payments were on time and **97%** said they received 'some' or 'all' of their payment.

**88%** of parents whose family-based arrangements involved regular financial payments said they paid or received some or all of their child maintenance **and** it was usually or always on time.

See **Table 3** (accompanying this publication) for full data.

<sup>1</sup> (see **About these statistics** for details on methodology change)

## Children on family-based arrangements

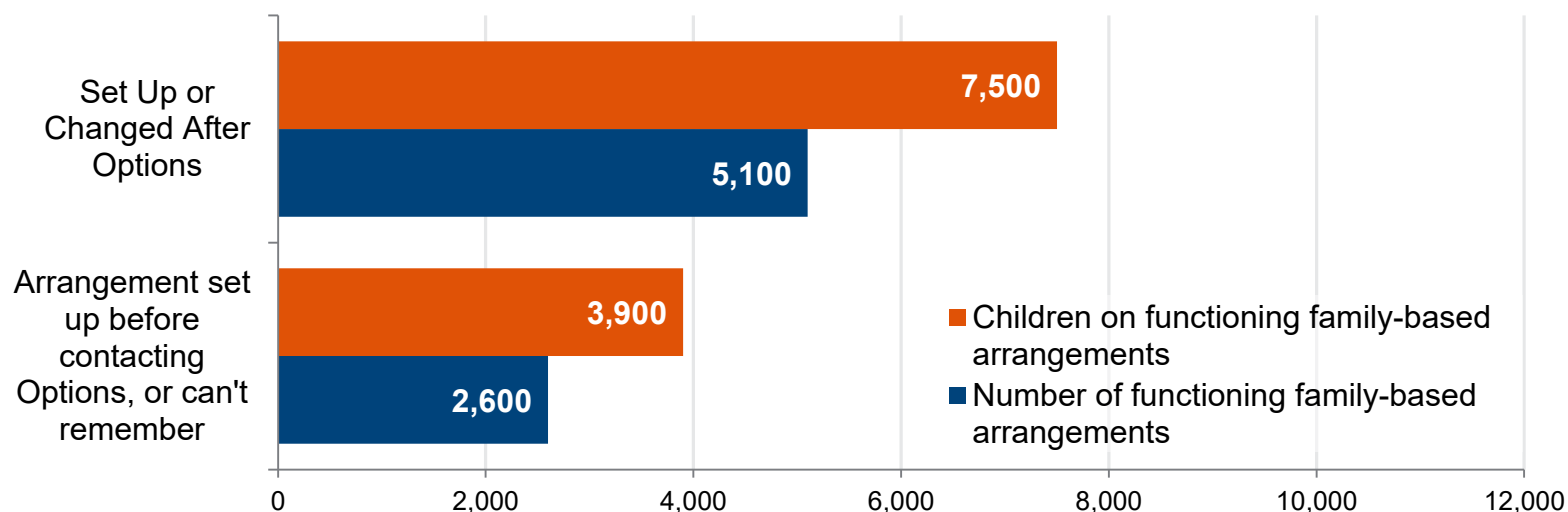
The objective of Child Maintenance Options is to support parents to set up arrangements that work for them. We ask parents about their arrangements to determine whether or not they are **functioning**.

A family-based arrangement consisting of regular financial payments is counted as **functioning** if all or some of the agreed money is being paid. A family-based arrangement that contains non regular payments or payments in kind is considered to be **functioning** if the parent believes it is working 'fairly well' or 'very well'.

The count of children in the below graph includes the number of **children on functioning family-based arrangements** as defined above.

### 5,100 functioning family-based arrangements were created after contacting Options

Functioning family-based arrangements and children on these arrangements for parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019, surveyed in August 2019



**5,100** functioning family-based arrangements were set up or changed by parents after contacting Child Maintenance Options between February and April 2019.

- **7,500** children are on these arrangements.

There were an additional **2,600** functioning family-based arrangements that might not have been set up after contact with Options between February and April 2019. This could be because the arrangement was set up before the parent contacted Options or the parents could not remember if they set up their arrangement before or after they spoke to Options. These are classed as other family-based arrangements. **3,900** children were on these arrangements.

See **Table 4** (accompanying this publication) for full data.

## About these statistics

The data are produced through four quarterly surveys and one annual longitudinal survey conducted by Child Maintenance Options on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Of the parents who contacted Options between February and April 2019 a sample were contacted to see what child maintenance arrangements they had in place and how they thought the arrangements were working.

The population is all separated parents who have had a full telephone conversation about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options.

- Certain types of customers are excluded from the sampling frame for practical purposes, including non-English speakers and parents who opt out of being contacted for research purposes.

The figures shown in this publication are of how many people, after contacting Options, go on to set up an arrangement or not. For estimates of the total number of parents without an arrangement, in Great Britain, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/separated-families-population-statistics-april-2014-to-march-2017>.

In the quarterly surveys, the results are weighted to be representative of the number of parents who had a full telephone conversation about their child maintenance needs with Child Maintenance Options in that quarter. For the annual longitudinal survey, the results are weighted to be representative of the child maintenance arrangements parents said they had in the quarterly surveys.

A result is **statistically significant** if it is unlikely to be due to chance. This publication measures statistical significance at the 95% level which means you would only expect to see the result caused by chance 1 in 20 times.

This publication includes the 2019 Q1 survey results. The 2019 Q2 Options Outcomes survey (scheduled publication: Spring 2020) will be the last publication in this statistical series.

Due to recent changes to the Child Maintenance Options service, an increasing numbers of interactions are taking place online. Therefore, this means that a survey based on telephone contacts will no longer provide a valid measure of outcomes from the service. Alternative measures on the outcome of this service are being considered.

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority. These guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code>

## Where to find out more

This document and the summary tables can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/child-maintenance-arrangements-made-after-speaking-to-cm-options-feb-2020>

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

The Child Maintenance Options website has further information on their work: <http://www.cmoptions.org/>

Information and statistics on the Child Maintenance Service and separated families: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/child-maintenance-facts-and-figures>