

Experimental Statistics:

Children Benefiting from an Effective Family-based Maintenance Arrangement Secured After Contacting Child Maintenance Options, GB - as of end of March 2014

Headline Statistics

- The Department for Work and Pensions' strategic objective around child maintenance is to ensure the maximum number of children who live apart from one or both parents benefit from an effective maintenance arrangement through private or statutory means.
- Child Maintenance Options contributes towards this objective by providing a free and impartial advice service that offers parents information on different ways to accomplish this.
- Effectiveness of Child Maintenance Options is measured through regular in-house surveys whose results are reported in this publication.
- The results show that over the course of 2013/14

41, 000 children

benefited from an effective Family-based (or private) arrangement, secured after contact with Child Maintenance Options.

- What is more,

183, 000 children

have benefited in this way since the creation of the Child Maintenance Options service, in 2008.

- Child Maintenance Options has maintained a steady performance over 2013/14, despite becoming the mandatory gateway for accessing the statutory Child Maintenance Service.

15%

of parents touching Child Maintenance Options choose an effective Family-based arrangement.

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Introduction

1. This publication contains statistics on:
 - The number and percentage of effective Family-based Arrangements (FBAs) secured by separated parents, for the maintenance of their children, after contacting the Child Maintenance (CM) Options service.
 - The number of children benefiting, as a result of these effective FBAs.
2. These figures are provided over two timeframes; the last financial year (2013/14) and since the creation of CM Options, in 2008.
3. These figures cover Great Britain only, as CM Options is a service available to residents of Great Britain.
4. This is the first official release of this type of information since December 2012 [1, 2].
5. Since then, the Child Maintenance Service has undergone reforms.
6. In November 2013, as part of these reforms, the CM Options service became the mandatory gateway to accessing the statutory 2012 Child Maintenance Service (CMS).
7. In practical terms this means, parents must talk to CM Options **first**, before they are able to access the CMS and to put in place a statutory arrangement through the CMS. Cases of domestic violence are accelerated through this process.
8. This publication will cover the broad aims of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to child maintenance and how CM Options fits within this. Next we cover survey methodology and results from 2013/14. The last section covers conclusions surrounding the outcomes for children of separated parents who come into contact with CM Options.
9. These statistics are still undergoing a period of development and review, as a result of changes to survey methodology. They are classified as experimental statistics and so they may be revised in future editions.
10. We welcome comments around this work from users and interested groups.

Background

11. DWP's strategic objective in relation to child maintenance is to maximise the number of those children who live apart from one or both parents for whom effective child maintenance arrangements are in place.
12. These arrangements can be through the Courts, the CMS or through separated parents setting them up independently which we refer to as Family-based arrangements.
13. CM Options [3] has contributed towards this goal since it was created, in July 2008. It was created to help separated parents navigate their way towards a maintenance arrangement, for the benefit of their children, by providing parents with information on the different ways they could accomplish this.
14. Now, well-established, CM Options continues to provide this information but encourages separated parents to choose an FBA where this is a viable and appropriate option.
15. The service is predominantly telephone based. Agents provide free, impartial advice, literature, tools and support, covering arrangements through both statutory mechanisms, and through private means. They also provide information on wider issues such as housing, work and money.
16. DWP monitor CM Options' effectiveness, at helping separated parents to secure arrangements, through regular customer telephone surveys. The main outputs of interest from these surveys are outlined in paragraph 1.
17. The survey management, design and analyses are conducted by analysts in DWP.
18. The survey fieldwork is carried out by the CM Options supplier on behalf of DWP.

Methodology

Definitions

19. As mentioned the ultimate objective of this research is to measure:

The number of children benefiting from an effective FBA secured (made or changed) following parental contact with the CM Options service:

- during 2013/14 (the **annual flow** of children benefiting);
- and since July 2008, when CM Options was created (the **stock** of children benefiting).

20. An **effective FBA**, for the purpose of this research is defined as, either:

- A regular financial arrangement where at least some of the agreed amount is always/usually received on time and whether the parent considers the arrangement to be working very/fairly well;
- or an ad hoc arrangement which includes a financial element (or transaction in kind e.g. school uniform) and whether the parent considers the arrangement to be working very/fairly well.

Survey Design

21. The data come from quarterly and annual longitudinal surveys conducted by DWP (see table 1 for timetabling information).

22. Our target population is separated parents who use CM Options via the telephone. These customers fall into two groups: inbound and outbound callers. Inbound calls are calls from customers to the service. Outbound calls are calls from CM Options to customers referred on by Jobcentre Plus.

23. There are other methods of contacting CM Options e.g. through the website or email. However, these methods are relatively small in comparison and at present are not incorporated into our sampling design.

24. The sample is drawn to a stratified simple random sample design, where the strata are Call Type (inbound/outbound) and Month of Call (calendar month). Past work in this area has shown differences in the proportion of arrangements over time and call type.

25. It is important to note that customers are given a **minimum of a two month lag** between their first contact with CM Options and when they are surveyed. This is to allow time for arrangements to be formed.

26. Certain types of customers are excluded from the sampling frame for practical purposes e.g. non-English speakers, cases of domestic violence, etc.
27. Results are weighted up to the population totals of callers and so will adjust for non-response.

Measuring the Flow

28. Each quarter customers are surveyed, as described above, to determine the actual outcome of their conversation with CM Options i.e. whether an arrangement was secured.
29. The longitudinal survey re-contacts customers from the first three quarters of the year to determine whether arrangements reported earlier are still in place. This survey aims to provide a robust view on arrangement outcomes for reporting at the end of the financial year (as outlined in the next paragraph).
30. Therefore, to determine the annual flow, we combine the results from the last quarter of the year (Quarter 4) and the longitudinal survey.
 - This covers customer calls from February 2013 to January 2014.
 - Both surveys are scheduled within close proximity to ensure reported outcomes are current.
 - Annual results of outcomes are reported to the end of March 2014 so that we have a robust annual view on the number of **current** effective FBAs that are in place after touching CM Options and the resultant number of children benefiting.

Measuring the Stock

31. Determining the stock figure up to March 14 is much more complicated. Past methodology involved contacting respondents from the quarterly surveys dating back to the start of the service (July 2008). This was to determine if previously reported arrangements had changed or broken down.
32. This design is unsustainable, as time advances. Respondents change their contact details, as well as not being able to remember the information around their conversation with CM Options. So essentially, the sample and its quality reduce considerably with time.
33. The new methodology takes the last, robust reported position, as the baseline and works forward from there using assumptions. So, we assume that:
 - March 2012 is the baseline stock of effective FBA: 89, 000 [2]. We consider this as robust because this was the final point at which the previous

longitudinal surveys took place. Therefore it accounts for flows in and out of the stock-base.

- Approximately 16% of effective FBAs drop-off over the course of a year and therefore 4 % per quarter. This was estimated using past survey data to track how many effective FBAs survived over a two-year time period. However, it is hoped to revise this as improved information becomes available. This deflation rate is applied to the stock each year. In addition, we apply the quarterly deflation rate to the quarterly survey results of 2012/13, as longitudinal surveys did not take place during this time.

34. Therefore using this method, it is estimated that by March 2013, a stock of approximately 98, 000 effective FBAs were secured after contact with CM Options.
35. To derive the number of children benefiting we multiply by 1.7, the average number of children per effective FBA which has been observed over time on the quarterly surveys. This results in an estimate of 168, 000 children benefiting at the end of March 2013.
36. These figures will be conservative, as we do not have an equivalent rate of on-flow of customers from movements within arrangement types (i.e. those who move from another arrangement type (or none) to an effective FBA).
37. Each part of the estimate will have its own survey error associated with it, so the final figure will be an approximation. Therefore these estimates should be treated as a guide as to the performance of CM Options over time, rather than an absolute.
38. Finally to determine the stock up to March 14 we build on the result from paragraph 34. 98, 000 effective FBAs are deflated again for 16% of effective FBAs breaking down. To this we add the annual flow from 2013/14 which already accounts for movement between different arrangements states. Finally we apply the average number of children from effective FBAs over time (1.7) to arrive at the number of children benefiting (see paragraph 58 for results) as a result of effective FBAs secured following contact with CM Options.
39. The stock results up to March 2014 therefore, cover customers first touching the service from July 2008 to January 2014.

Survey Questionnaire

40. The questionnaires are designed by the DWP analysts and they focus on providing the necessary information to ultimately measure the number of children benefiting from an effective FBA.
41. The quarterly questionnaire:

- Has been used through a number of surveys since 2011. During this period it has been adjusted to account for interviewer feedback to improve the clarity and aid the understanding of questions.
- It usually lasts between ten to fifteen minutes.

42. The longitudinal questionnaire:

- Has been completely redesigned to reduce respondent burden. It was based on the previous longitudinal questionnaire and it has been used for the first time this year.
- Questions are accepted as a work in progress and the questionnaire's validity will improve over time.
- It usually lasts between 5 to 10 minutes.

Fieldwork

43. As mentioned the survey fieldwork is carried out by the CM Options contractor on behalf of DWP.

44. DWP analysts provide close supervision and agent training on interviewing techniques to maximise response.

45. Survey calls are listened to, to maintain data quality and improve delivery.

46. Due to external factors, this year the surveys were not able to run to the prescribed timetable. This is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Survey Timetable

Survey	Customer's first contact	Fieldwork (Scheduled/Actual)	
Quarter 1	February to April 2013	July 2013	July 2013
Quarter 2	May to July 2013	October 2013	October to December 2014
Quarter 3	August to October 2013	January 2014	February to March 2014
Quarter 4	November to December 2013 and January 2104	April 2014	June 2104
Longitudinal	February to October 2013	February to March 2014	July 2014

47. The impact of delays is that customers had a greater length of time to form arrangements than usual. It is assumed that has not had a significant impact on the results.

Estimation

48. Each respondent was asked about their current situation to enable us to categorise them as having an effective FBA and the number of children benefiting from that effective FBA.
49. Important variables included: parenting role, arrangement type, when the arrangement was secured, whether CM Options was contacted, the number of children covered by the arrangement, whether the majority of the agreed maintenance was received, timeliness of payments and how the parent viewed the arrangement was working, etc.
50. For the longitudinal surveys, if customers reported 'No change' since their quarterly survey we took this to be correct and used the factual detail from the previous survey e.g. the number of children. However, we did ask customers questions around the effectiveness of the arrangement again, as it was felt this was much more subjective than the number of children changing, for example.
51. Standard calculations for our sampling design were used to compute the results.

Limitations

52. Response rates remain approximately 20% for the quarterly surveys and 40% for the longitudinal survey respectively. Therefore non-response bias is a real concern and so further work is required to model and adjust for it.
53. Although CM Options agents are provided with some interviewer training by DWP analysts, they are not classed as professional survey interviewers.
54. A further limitation is that CM Options agents have the dual responsibility for conducting Options conversations with customers, as well as surveys.
55. The stock methodology accounts for previous customers' effective FBAs coming to an end through the deflation rate. However, it does not account for previous customers forming new effective FBAs when they started off with a different arrangement type (or none), if they re-contacted CM Options. Again further investigation on this is needed.
56. The increase in the number of effective FBAs over time does suggest that CM Options is having a positive impact in these arrangements being formed but this is not the same as concluding the relationship is causal. In other words, there is a possibility; parents would have formed these arrangements regardless of their contact with CM Options.

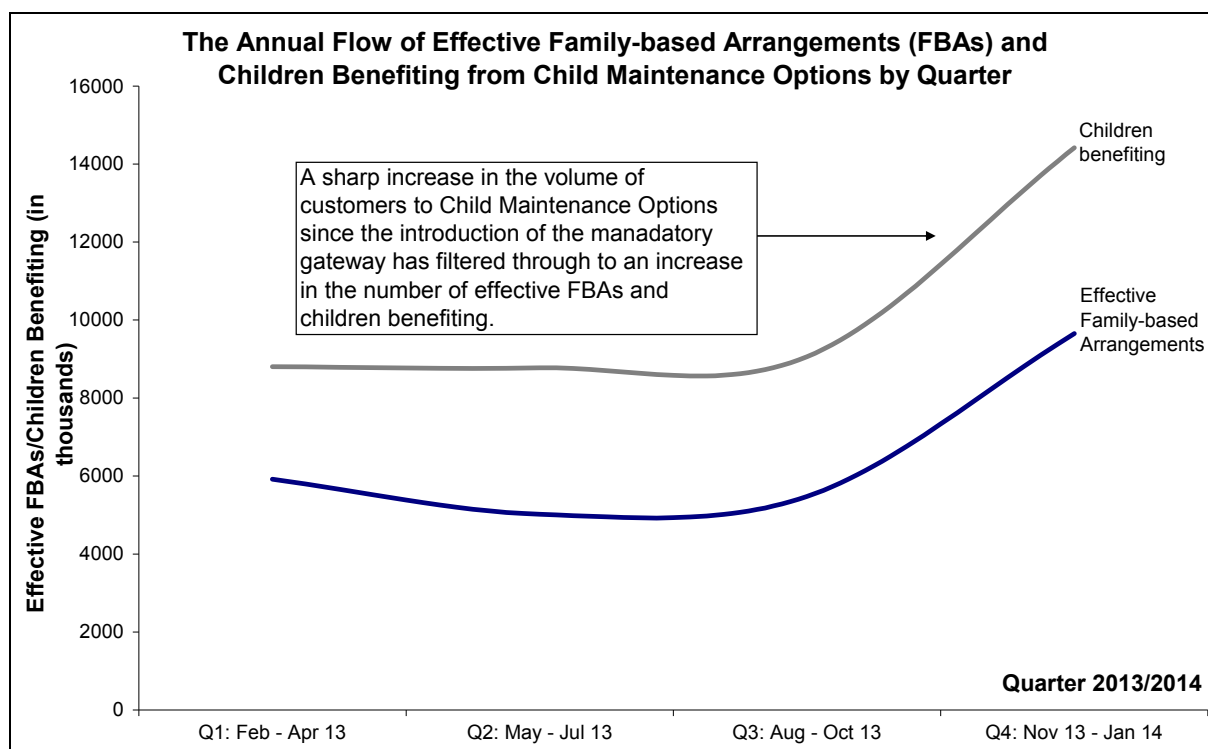
Results

The Annual Flow

57. Over the course of the financial year, 2013/2014, we found that (to the nearest thousand):

- There were 26, 000 effective FBAs secured after separated parents made contact with CM Options.
- The number of children benefiting from these effective FBAs was 41, 000.
- Figure 1 breaks this down for the year. A steady performance was maintained throughout the first part of the year. The introduction of the mandatory gateway to the CMS, has increased the volume of customers in the last quarter. This trend has followed through to the effective FBAs and children benefiting.

Figure 1: Results by Quarter



- The percentage of customers choosing an effective FBA is 15% and although this varies between 13-18% in the quarterly percentages the differences are not statistically significant at the 95% level of confidence.
- This strongly suggests that the increased effective FBAs in quarter 4 arise from an increase in volumes rather than agents dramatically changing their

performance.

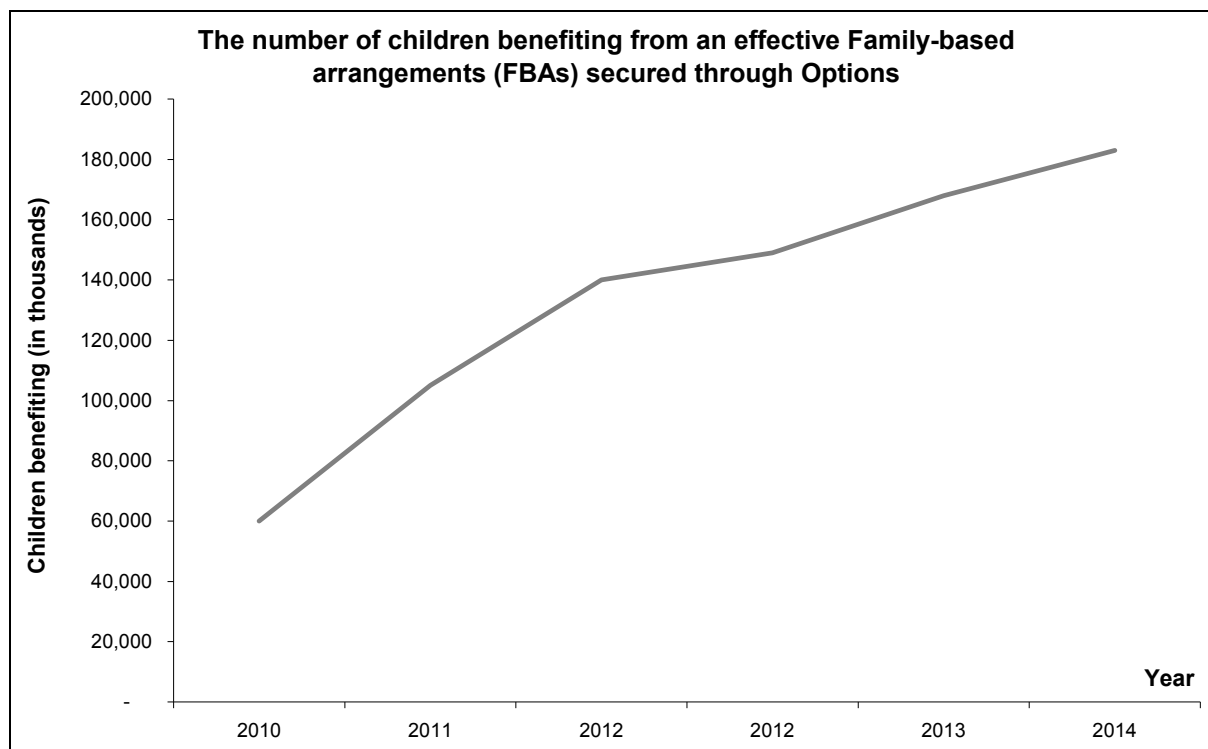
- However, this does tell us that CM Options was able to maintain a stable performance despite the influx of more customers, some of which would initially, at least, really only consider the statutory Child Maintenance Service.
- Note detailed tables are provided in Annex A which includes confidence intervals around these estimates.

The Stock

58. Since the creation of CM Options, in July 2008, up to March 2014 we found that (to the nearest thousand):

- 109, 000 effective FBA arrangements were secured following parents' contact with CM Options.
- And 183, 000 children were benefiting from these arrangements.
- These figures maintain the trend that we have seen over time. The graph below plots data that has been released into the public domain since 2010.

Figure 2: The Stock of Children Benefiting Over Time



- We expect this trend to continue to increase in the medium term, as more

separated parents close their Child Support Agency cases.

Conclusions

59. Results presented here suggest that CM Options has maintained a steady performance despite a significant increase to the volume of customers accessing the service.
60. Over the last financial year alone 41, 000 children have benefited from privately agreed maintenance arrangements that their parents have secured after contacting CM Options and 183, 000 children since the existence of this service.
61. Therefore, the results suggest that, CM Options continues to provide a valid contribution towards the Government's ultimate objective of providing children with the right start in life.

Annexes

Annex A: Detailed Tables

Table 2: Detailed Results (reported to the nearest thousand)

Quarter	Customers' Month of First telephone contact with CM Options	Population of Customers	Sample size	Effective FBAs results of Options			Resultant number of Children Benefiting			Percentage of Customers choosing an Effective FBA	Average number of children per Effective FBA
				Total	Lower CI**	Upper CI	Total	Lower CI	Upper CI		
Q1	Feb - Apr 13	32,956	149	6,000	4,000	8,000	9,000	5,000	12,000	18%	1.5
Q2	May - Jul 13	37,168	356	5,000	4,000	6,000	9,000	6,000	11,000	14%	1.7
Q3	Aug - Oct 13	41,380	395	5,000	4,000	7,000	9,000	6,000	12,000	13%	1.7
Q4	Nov 13 - Jan 14	59,366	516	10,000	8,000	12,000	14,000	11,000	18,000	16%	1.5
Year-end											
1-4	Q1-4: Feb 13 - Jan 14	170,870	1,416	26,000	23,000	29,000	41,000	35,000	47,000	15%	1.6

**Some numbers may not add up due to rounding

*CI stands for confidence interval calculated at the 95% level. So for example, we can be 95% certain that the true number of effective Family-based arrangements secured after contact with CM Options by the end of 2013/14, lies between 23, 000 and 29,000 (in bold in the table above).

***Note customers contacting the service were given a minimum of two months before they were surveyed to allow them the time to form arrangements.

Annex B: Population Totals

Table 3: Population and Sample Totals

Month of Customer Contact	Population of Customers		Survey sample of customers	
	Inbound Call	Outbound Call	Inbound responses	Outbound responses
Feb-13	2,679	7,078	12	25
Mar-13	4,660	6,914	24	37
Apr-13	5,044	6,581	18	33
May-13	4,674	6,781	40	69
Jun-13	5,569	6,913	62	55
Jul-13	5,987	7,244	61	69
Aug-13	7,496	7,181	76	65
Sep-13	8,821	6,447	82	57
Oct-13	8,289	3,146	88	27
Nov-13	10,542	4,533	83	39
Dec-13	9,157	7,593	73	85
Jan-14	15,434	12,107	113	123
Total	88,352	82,518	732	684

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