



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Child Maintenance Options Client Satisfaction

Background information and methodology

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# Purpose of the statistics

## 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, is for when the parents can't agree to a family-based arrangement. Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first speak to Child Maintenance Options (Options).

Child Maintenance Options was established in 2008, and is designed to be impartial, empathetic and tailored to the individual needs of clients. Options agents provide free advice to help parents pick the child maintenance arrangement best suited to their situation.

## Purpose

The statistics in this report give an overview of client satisfaction with Child Maintenance Options, from April 2014 to September 2016.

The figures are used for analysis by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Child Maintenance Options itself. They help identify issues and improve client service. Finally, the statistics aid in fulfilling DWP's obligation to answer parliamentary questions and respond to Freedom of Information requests.

## Source

The statistics in this report are based on the analysis of telephone interviews conducted by Child Maintenance Options agents in cooperation with DWP. The survey is conducted once a month among parents who have had contact with Child Maintenance Options in the preceding month. The sample is selected randomly, although certain groups of clients are excluded for practical reasons:

- Non-English speakers.
- Potentially violent clients.
- Clients who have not given permission to be contacted for further research.
- Clients without a known address or contact number.
- Clients who have been contacted for surveying in the preceding six months.

Interviewees are informed that their responses are kept confidential and that they can opt out or refuse to answer at any time.

## Limitations

There are some potential issues with the results that could lead to bias:

1. Of the large sample selected for surveying, only a small proportion completes the interview. This is partly because clients cannot be contacted and partly because they refuse to participate. The resulting low response rate raises the possibility of non-response bias.
2. Surveys are conducted by Child Maintenance Options agents who are provided with interviewer training but are not classed as professional survey interviewers.
3. Options agents have the dual responsibility for conducting Options conversations with customers, as well as surveys, though not as part of the same contact.
4. Some clients may confuse Child Maintenance Options with the Child Maintenance Service; this may cloud their opinion of the Child Maintenance Options.
5. The exclusion of some clients (see above) could lead to biased results.
6. Sample sizes for parents with some/no day to day care of children are significantly lower than parents with main day to day care of the child. This is because the majority of calls to Child Maintenance Options are from parents with main day to day care. This may lead to the views of parents with some/no day to day care being misrepresented.
7. Results are not weighted to make them representative of region or parent role.

Therefore, these estimates should be treated as a guide to satisfaction rather than an absolute figure.

## Definitions and terminology

**Satisfaction** is a measure of Child Maintenance Options ability to meet or surpass client expectations. It is measured by asking interviewees the following question:

“How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the service you received from Child Maintenance Options?”

Please use a scale of 1-10, where 1 = Very poor and 10 = Excellent.”

The Satisfaction rate is defined as the percentage of responses that are 7 or higher.

**Overall Satisfaction** is measured by the response to the same question but all results between April 2014 and September 2016 are combined.

**Satisfaction with call waiting times** is measured by the following question:

“When you called Options, how satisfied were you with how long it took to get through? Were you very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?”

The call waiting times satisfaction rate is defined as the proportion of satisfied or very satisfied responses, excluding those that were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This rate is reported as an average for the entire period during which surveys took place.

**Client Service** is a measure of how the interviewees rate the various aspects of service provided by Options. It is calculated by the summation of responses to six client service questions:

“I’m going to read out some statements about your conversation with the Options agent. Using a scale of 1-10, where 1=Very poor and 10=excellent, please rate each statement. The agent...

1. Explained what the Child Maintenance Options service is about?
2. Was easy to talk to?
3. Was understanding of your current situation?
4. Had appropriate information and support about child maintenance, specific to your situation?
5. Helped me to understand the different kind of options available for child maintenance?
6. Helped me to work out what is the best kind of maintenance arrangement for me?”

Client service is then calculated by the percentage of responses that are 7 or above.

**Overall Client Service** is calculated by combining the scores for every month between April 2014 and September 2016.

## Status of the statistics

### **Ad-hoc statistics**

These statistics are badged as ad-hoc as they are a one off publication to support the evaluation of the Child Maintenance Reforms.

### **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

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

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

The Child Maintenance Service website has further information:

<https://www.gov.uk/child-maintenance>

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)