

Child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to Child Maintenance Options

Data up to August 2019

● Annual

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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. One of the primary intentions of the Options service is to encourage parents, where possible, to set up a family-based arrangement.

Overall, **174,313** parents had a conversation with Options between February 2018 and January 2019. The estimates in this publication are based on telephone interviews with 5,808 of those parents.

In order to understand the long term outcomes of parents who speak to Options we conduct a longitudinal survey. Parents who contacted Options between February 2018 and October 2018 were surveyed at least two months after they called Options to see what child maintenance arrangement they had set up. Some of these parents were surveyed again 9-18 months later in the longitudinal survey to assess whether their arrangements had changed, and if over time Options had successfully supported lasting arrangements.

Alongside this survey, and also included within this report are the results from the Options Outcomes quarter 4 survey results. We conduct quarterly surveys to ask parents about their child maintenance arrangements and the extent to which these arrangements may have been influenced by speaking to Options. We also ask parents if they think their arrangements are working well. **38,329** parents contacted Options between November 2018 and January 2019 with the estimates in this publication based on telephone interviews with 1,159 of those parents.

Main Stories

21,500

Between February 2018 and October 2018, Child Maintenance Options helped parents set-up **21,500 family-based arrangements**

83%

83% of these were still in place in August 2019

At a glance

Page

85% of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2018 still had an arrangement of any type in August 2019

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66% of parents who contacted Options in February-October 2018 said their Child Maintenance Service arrangement was working well in August 2019

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90% of parents who contacted Options in February-October 2018 and still had a family-based arrangement in August 2019 said their FBA was working well

6

38,900 children whose FBA arrangements were set up in February-October 2018, were on functioning family based arrangements in August 2019

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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 who a paying parent has a child maintenance arrangement for.

For more details see the Background Information document:

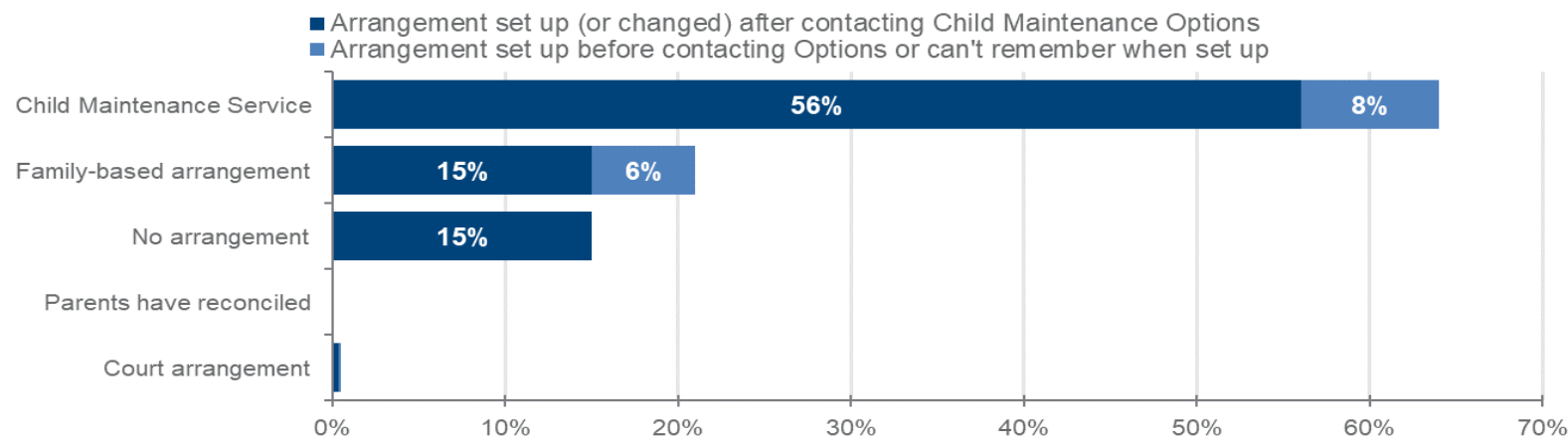
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/effective-family-based-child-maintenance-arrangements-statistics-background-information-and-methodology>

Child Maintenance Arrangements – longitudinal results

We surveyed parents who contacted Options between February 2018 and October 2018 to ask about their Child Maintenance arrangement at least two months after they spoke to Options. In July-August 2019, some of these parents were re-surveyed to assess if their child maintenance arrangements had changed, and if over time Options had successfully supported lasting arrangements.

85% of parents who contacted Options between February 2018 and October 2018 still had a child maintenance arrangement (of any type) in place by August 2019

Types of child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2018 and October 2018 and were surveyed in July-August 2019



85% of parents still had a child maintenance arrangement of any type – i.e. whether a CMS arrangement (Direct Pay or Collect and Pay) or an FBA in August 2019. This figure is similar to the quarter 4 results (page 4), which therefore suggests that once an arrangement is set up through Options it seems to remain in place over time. **21%** of parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February 2018 and October 2018 had a family-based arrangement in August 2019. Around **15%** of all parents set up or changed their family-based arrangement after contacting Options, while **6%** already had a family-based arrangement or could not remember whether they made their arrangement before or 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.

56% of the parents who contacted Options had an arrangement through the Child Maintenance Service, this is higher than the previous year. **15%** had not agreed a child maintenance arrangement, this is less than the previous year. It could be that the fall in 'no arrangement' is related to the rise in CMS arrangements being set up.

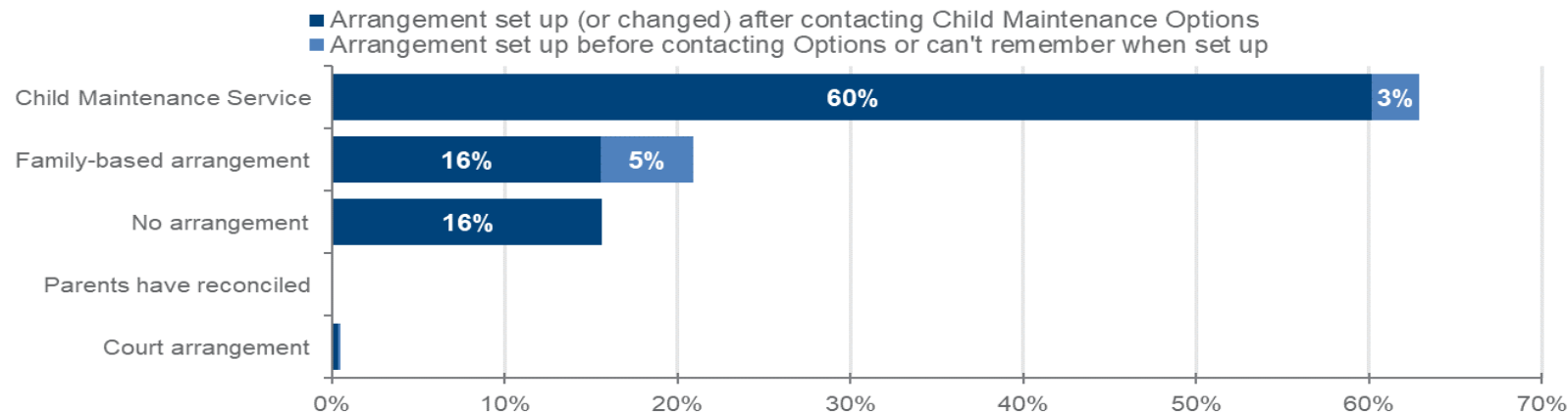
See **Table 1** in the summary tables that accompany this publication for full data.

Child maintenance arrangements – quarter 4 results¹

The quarterly surveys ask parents about their child maintenance arrangements, whether they were made after speaking to Options and if they think their arrangements are working well. Out of the **38,329** parents that had contact with Child Maintenance Options between November 2018 and January 2019, we estimate **84%** had a child maintenance arrangement when contacted. This is **32,300** Child Maintenance Service, court and family-based arrangements.

84% of parents who contacted Options between November 2018 and January 2019 had an arrangement of any type

Types of child maintenance arrangements made by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between November 2018 and January 2019 and were surveyed in June-July 2019



Just over a fifth (**21%**)² of parents who had contacted Child Maintenance Options between November 2018 and January 2019 had a family-based arrangement. **16%** set up or changed their family-based arrangement after contacting Options, while **5%** 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.

63% of parents who had contacted Child Maintenance Options between November 2018 and January 2019 had an arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service. **60%** 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** 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.

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 and/or transactions in kind.

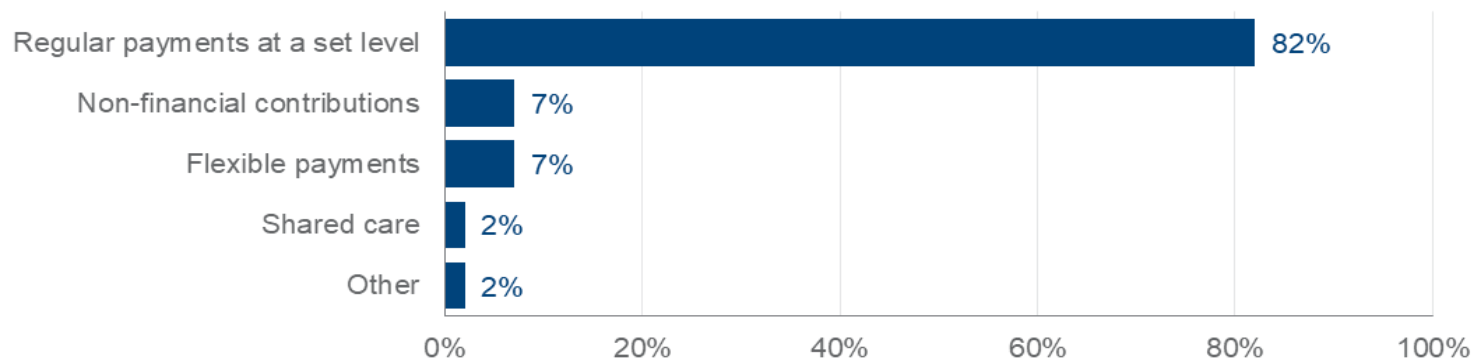
Options helped set up around 21,500 family-based arrangements between February and October 2018, 83% of these were still in place by August 2019

In July-August 2019, a sample of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2018 and had previously been surveyed were re-contacted to see if their child maintenance arrangements were still in place or if they had changed.

- In total, **21,500** family-based arrangements were made by parents following contact with Options between February and October 2018.
- By August 2019 there were **17,800** family-based arrangements in place.

82% of these family-based arrangements were made up of regular financial payments at a set level.

The type of family-based arrangements set up by parents who contacted Child Maintenance Options between February-October 2018 and which were still in place as of August 2019

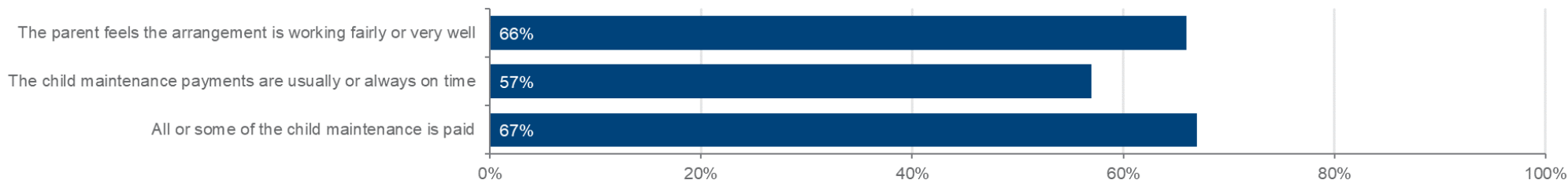


See **Tables 1, 2 and 3** for full data.

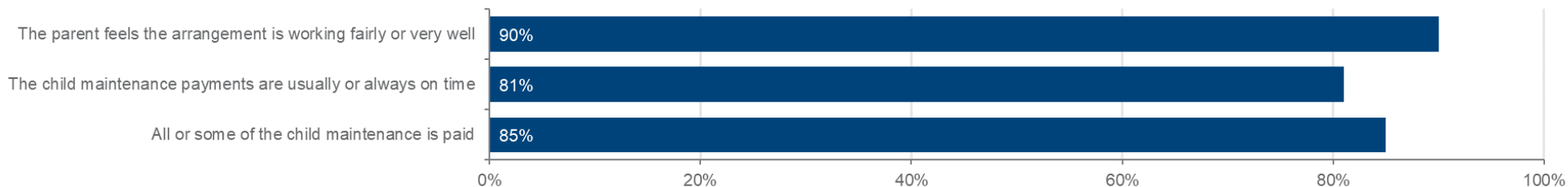
Parents views about their Arrangements

Parents in both the longitudinal and quarterly surveys are asked whether they feel their child maintenance arrangements are working well.

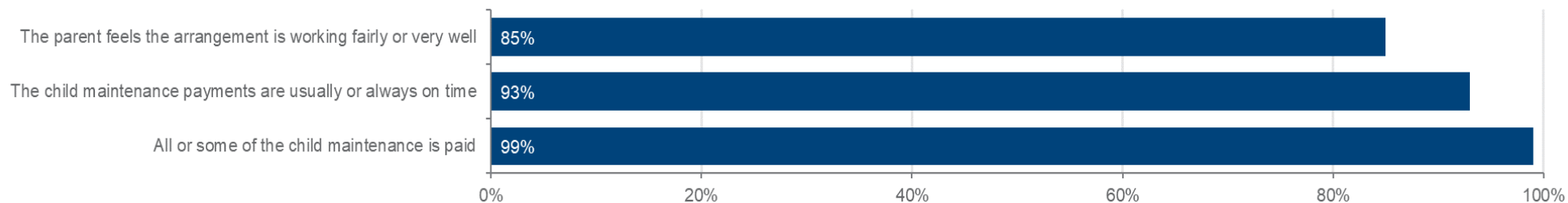
Longitudinal survey - 60% of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2018 said their arrangement with the Child Maintenance Service was working well in August 2019



Longitudinal Survey - 90% of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2018 said their family-based arrangement was working well in August 2019



Quarter 4 Survey - 85% of parents who contacted Options between November 2018 and January 2019 said their family-based arrangement was working well

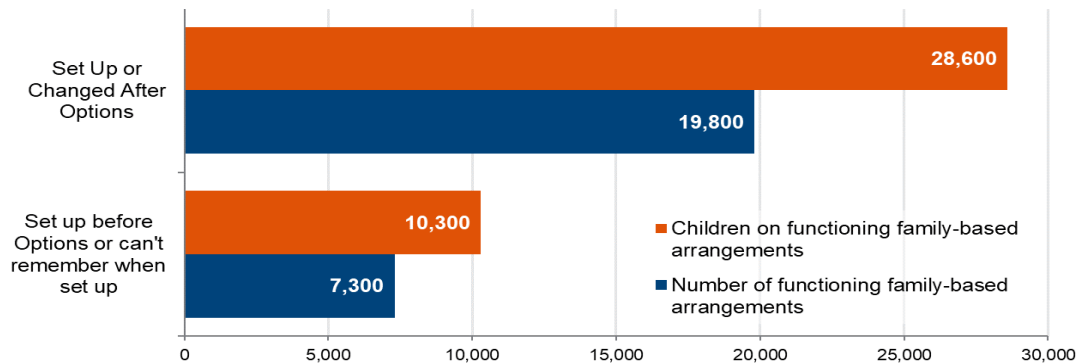


See **Tables 4 and 5** for full data.

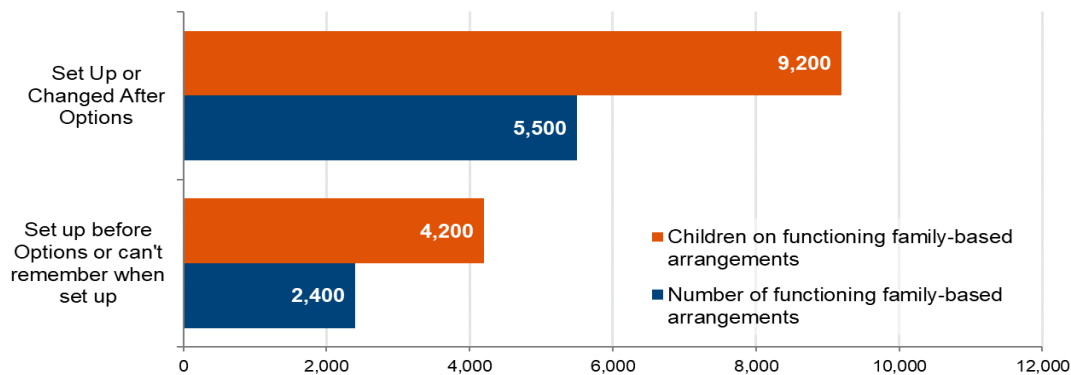
Children on family-based arrangements

Options aims 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 and/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.

Longitudinal Survey - In August 2019, 38,900 children were on functioning family-based arrangements set up after contact with Options between February and October 2018



Quarter 4 Survey - 13,400 children were on functioning family-based arrangements set up after contact with Options between November 2018 and January 2019



See Table 6 for full data

About these statistics

The data is 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).

In July- August 2019, a sample of parents who contacted Options between February and October 2018 and had previously been surveyed were re-contacted to see if their child maintenance arrangements were still in place or if they had changed. Alongside this are the results from the quarter 4 survey which contacted parents in June/July who spoke to Options between November 2018 and January 2019.

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.

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 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 cannot be attributed 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 2018 longitudinal survey results. This will be the last publication of the longitudinal survey. The 2019 Q2 Options Outcomes survey (scheduled publication: Spring 2019) 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.

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/>

Changes to the publication

Previous publications included a figure for cases which had a previous CSA case. They are not included in this publication as the Options service has very few calls which fall into this category now and therefore would not provide robust statistics.

The previous longitudinal publication combined the results for quarter 4 and the longitudinal survey to give overall statistics. As seen in this publication and the accompanying tables document, we have kept the quarter 4 survey results separate in order to give more accurate statistics of the type and number of arrangements in August 2019.

The methodology used for the calculations on page 6 was improved for quarter 3, 4 and the longitudinal surveys to more accurately reflect an arrangement with a regular financial payment as defined by the parent. Previous publications have not been revised.

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-data-up-to-august-2019>

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

Information and statistics on the Child Maintenance Service can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-the-2012-statutory-child-maintenance-scheme>