

Proposals for a revised Quarterly Summary of Statistics relating to the Child Support Agency, part of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission: Results of the external consultation and the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission's response.

Introduction

On 5 June 2009, the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission launched an external consultation on proposals for revising the Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS) relating to the CSA, part of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission. The consultation document 'Child Support Agency National Statistics: A consultation on future plans' may be viewed at http://www.childmaintenance.org/pdf/CSAQSS_consultation_documentation.pdf. The consultation was open to everyone, with the following key stakeholders notified by email:

Centre for Separated Families
Gingerbread
National Citizens Advice Bureau
Child Poverty Action Group
Resolution
Families need Fathers

The closing date for responses was 28 August 2009. In all, seven different respondents provided written submissions. The Commission thanks those who have participated in the consultation.

Responses to the consultation

The responses to the consultation were largely related to the improved accessibility of the revised QSS, with detailed comments on a number of issues received from two commentators.

The main theme of the contribution was:

- Overall the response to the revised CSA QSS was positive.
- Detailed comments regarding proposed data refinements.
- Requests for additional tables or breakdowns.

Summary of contributions received and the Commission's response

A table showing the full text of all the contributions and the Commission's response is attached at Annex A. This is structured into four sections, in line with the questions posed in the original document and the feedback received.

National Statistics for the CSA are published quarterly. The September 2009 QSS with figures for the quarter to September 2009, will be in the revised format

and will be released at the end of October 2009. Releases from September onwards will continue to be published on the Commission's web site and will be produced by the Commission in conjunction with DWP Information Directorate. This table provides an estimate, where appropriate, of the likely delivery dates for refinements to the QSS and for requests for additional information.

The exact dates for release of future QSS will be announced via the UK National Statistics Publication Hub ahead of publication. Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission releases from September 2009 onwards can be accessed at: www.statistics.gov.uk/hub.

Conclusion

The results of this consultation set out the CSA National Statistics work programme for the next twelve months. At the end of this time, the Commission will publish a follow-up response alongside the September 2010 QSS.

*Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission
September 2009*

Is the revised QSS easier to use and better focused?

Comments Received	Commission Response
<p>The revised Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS) is better focused and more accessible. Quarterly publication still seems most appropriate. Information provided could be further improved to allow contributions from “critical friends”.</p>	<p>No action required</p>
<p>Careful thought has obviously gone into more condensed information with some important figures being presented in brief under ‘key facts’, the greater use of graphs, and the presentation of data on a quarterly rather than on a monthly basis - all of which contribute to a greater clarity and ease of reference which will help communication to key audiences.</p> <p>However, publication of an ‘easy read’ version of the statistics, whilst a good idea in itself, does mean that certain detailed management information which has been made available up until now will no longer be publicly available. The Commission may thus end up appearing less open about the performance of the statutory service than the old CSA.</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges this and is taking account of all responses as part of this consultation. However, rather than being less open, the purpose of the revised QSS is to make the statistics more accessible.</p>
<p>We believe that the proposed changes will result in a more user-friendly and accessible format. We will continue to work with the underlying data that supports the QSS publication.</p> <p>There has been earlier discussion between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Commission about the wider framework within which the current QSS review is taking place. While we agree that the changes proposed in this specific consultation will result in a more usable format of the QSS, further changes may be necessary in the future to reflect ongoing reforms to the child maintenance system.</p>	<p>No action required.</p>
<p>We have no significant concerns about the revised format for reporting. The statistics of most interest to Citizens Advice would be the headline figures as listed at the beginning, and then the enforcement data towards the end. The remaining tables would become more interesting if we were trying to explore a particular issue and wanted to examine it in more detail through the statistics. One of</p>	<p>We recognise the importance of having robust statistics in this area and the Commission is currently doing wider research on its customer base which will include vulnerable clients.</p>

<p>the areas we feel should be analysed - somehow - is whether the drop in applications resulting from the repeal of Section 6 is leaving vulnerable parents with care without recourse to support because of pressure from a non-resident parent to choose maintenance direct which might not then be paid.</p>	
<p>On looking at the proposed Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS), I'm pleased to say that this is a much improved publication, this is due to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formatting of the pages and font size - making it easier to read, understand and follow • Introduction of Key Facts • Showing Quarterly information instead of Monthly • Now includes Graphs <p>More condensed and better focused on the main performance and trends against Key Ministerial Targets than previously published publications.</p>	<p>No action required</p>
<p>This is not extremely relevant however we think that the new, more customer focused proposal is more preferable.</p>	<p>No action required</p>

Is the revised format and presentation helpful and accessible?

Comments Received	Commission Response
<p>There appear to be discrepancies between statistics quoted now and other sources of information e.g.; those quoted to House of Commons Work & Pensions Select Committee and the Commission's website. This particularly applies to information on Enforcement actions and, in this case, figures on Liability Orders. "If different figures are quoted in different places and on different occasions then this does cast doubt on the accuracy of any of the information provided by the CSA".</p>	<p>A number of tables in the QSS are subject to planned revisions. These affect tables around intake/clearances, closures, uncleared work, throughput and enforcement. These changes are noted within the QSS.</p> <p>We recognise that the reporting of clerical performance within all tables in the QSS is not consistent and we will be taking steps to incorporate, where possible, all clerical management information. Appendix 1 details which tables within the QSS will</p>

	<p>include and exclude clerical performance.</p> <p>Changes to numbers presented may occur due to adjustments to existing methodology or changes to current recording systems. In accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics we will be publishing a revisions policy in due course. This will outline our response to changes to already published data.</p>
<p>As an organisation dealing directly with single parents, there sometimes appears a mismatch between the top line performance statistics produced by the Agency and individual customers' experiences. As part of the process of making the new Commission more customer-focused, we would like to see some thought given to the production of 'richer' information concerning matters important to parents. For example the end to end process for appeals rather than how long to clear appeals through the first stage and how long to revise...calculations following a decision.</p> <p>As a non-departmental public body, the Commission has been proud to emphasise that one of the advantages it has as an NDPB is that it has greater flexibility to work across government. A small way it could show this is to work together with the Tribunals Service to produce statistical information which reflects the 'end to end' appeals process.</p>	<p>Wider consideration will be given to this by the Commission in line with the specific work being done on the customer base.</p> <p>We will investigate what Tribunal Service information is available and whether it is possible to generate robust statistics in this area within appropriate resource constraints. We will report on this work in a follow up response to this consultation alongside the September 2010 QSS.</p>
<p>Section 6 (Tables 13.1/13.2) - Information should be retained. The tables are useful in consideration of the impact of the abolition of Section 6 of the 1991 Act on the choices made by poor parents with care. Also of interest is the proportion of parents with care on benefit who succeed in receiving statutory child maintenance. Publication of the proportion of non-resident parents on benefit is also relevant in understanding the numbers from whose benefit set deductions should be being made.</p> <p>CMEC may argue that, now that Section 6 has been abolished, it is no longer</p>	<p>The repeal of Section 6 removed the legal requirement for parents with care on income-related benefits to use the services of the CSA.</p> <p>Due to the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, methodological work</p>

<p>necessary to collect this data for its own purposes. We would argue it should do so, as part of monitoring compliance with its 'maximisation of effective maintenance arrangements' duty and in the context of its obligations under the Government's child poverty strategy.</p>	<p>is needed to provide this data. Following appropriate work and quality assurance, we will consider providing headline information in the key facts section.</p>
<p>By stripping out various elements of the old tables and not replacing them within the new proposed QSS - will this not create the Agency more work in the way of Ad-hoc request and Freedom of Information for data that's no longer contained within the new proposed QSS.</p>	<p>We will carefully monitor requests for information and review ongoing statistical requirements.</p>
<p>Deduction from Earnings Orders: The information is not particularly helpful in its present form. Whilst it is useful to see the number of DEOs granted, it does not reflect the total percentage of cases which are subject to a DEO. The CSA should disclose the total percentage of cases where a DEO is in place – and then provide statistics to show the show the number of those cases which are actually effective.</p>	<p>Additional information will be included within the Enforcement statistics table in September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Partially Compliant Information should be retained. Given that the Commission has an obligation to maximise the number of 'effective' arrangements, we would argue it is vital that figures are published showing how successful the statutory service is in ensuring that non-resident parents meet their statutory maintenance obligations in full, and not just in part. (It must be the case that, for cases within the statutory system, 'effective maintenance arrangements' are those where the non resident parent is paying in full.)</p>	<p>Analysis shows that a significant proportion of these cases move between partial and full compliance each month due to various payment cycles rather than non-payment. Given this it is felt to be misleading to include this breakdown within the QSS.</p>
<p>Weekly Liability Information should be retained. This gives an idea of the individual amounts the Agency is transferring, as well as an indication of the relative wealth/poverty of non-resident parents within the statutory service.</p>	<p>Information included within Caseload Status in the September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Rounding In the previous format for the quarterly statistics, numbers of cases were usually given to the nearest 100. The new publication rounds case numbers to the nearest 1000 (with the exception of the 'Clearance Types' table in Annex A). Clearly, this results in some loss of detail which is essential to enable accurate calculations of</p>	<p>In the September 2009 QSS all rounding will be to the nearest 100.</p>

rates of change. In some cases (e.g. page 14 of the new format) the figures in the table are rounded to the nearest 1000 but the figures in the text are rounded to the nearest 100.	
<p>Labelling</p> <p>Please clarify what the line on the graph refers to as the labelling is unclear. Is it a rolling average showing the average increase per month over the last 12 months, or does it show the increase in debt for that month only?</p>	This graph labelling will be amended for the September 2009 QSS.
<p>Complaints</p> <p>The list of 'key facts' includes information on complaints. Without the context of previous months' data, it is unclear from the figures what the trends are regarding complaints. It would be more helpful therefore to have a table on this. It is also not clear whether these figures have National Statistics status.</p>	The September 2009 QSS will show trend information within the key facts.
<p>Presentational</p> <p>Could the Summary of Key Measures table be improved and displayed better across the page?</p>	The key measures table has been enlarged and centralised in the September 2009 QSS.
<p>Charging Orders</p> <p>It is asserted that where a Charging Order has been granted an NRP is "then unable to remortgage or sell the property without satisfying the debt"</p> <p>This statement is untrue where a property is owned by two individuals jointly – e.g. the NRP and a new partner.</p> <p>The CSA appears to fail to recognise that a Charging Order is "overreached" when sale monies are paid to two trustees.</p>	<p>As part of the new QSS we will be reviewing all footnotes to ensure they remain relevant and accurate.</p> <p>We will seek assurance from Policy colleagues on this particular wording and ensure it is accurately reported in September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Throughput (table 4 & 5)</p> <p>Information should be retained. The overall impressive reduction in uncleared current scheme applications makes these tables less significant than they were, but nevertheless, beyond the snapshots of the proportion of cases cleared within the key measures of 12/18/26 weeks, it is important to keep an eye on how long it is taking for those cases not cleared within these time periods to be resolved – in order to find out the reasons why and press for further action if necessary.</p>	<p>We have improved the information presented within the throughput table to include volumes and percentages as well as volumes of cases 'not yet cleared'.</p> <p>This will be included in the September 2009 QSS.</p>

<p>Wording This text in this table just seems wrong. It states that the number with a positive outcome and the number of children benefiting as a result has fallen, when the table shows it has increased.</p>	<p>Wording will be amended in the September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Presentation In analysing getting money to children, there is a significant different between maintenance arranged and maintenance collected. We ask that consideration be given to the two appearing separately in the chart and figures presented.</p> <p>Could there be a visual presentation of the information in the table on page 22 please, and a table showing the data presented in the graph on page 21? Also please note that the graph on page 21 is unclear when printed.</p> <p>Please clarify what the line on the graph refers to as the labelling is unclear. Is it a rolling average showing the average increase per month over the last 12 months, or does it show the increase in debt for that month only?</p>	<p>Action has been taken to better present this information, in line with feedback received, in the September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Reasons for Closure Information should be retained. There are relevant policy reasons to track how many parents with care, already within the statutory system having had a calculation and schedule set up, choose to take up this option and no longer pursue their application.</p>	<p>In response to this feedback, statistics on 'Reasons for Closure' will be included in the September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Customer information Information to be included on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of parents who are receiving benefit • the gender of non-resident parents and parents with care and; • the employment status of non-resident parents (where there will continue to be important questions regarding the proportion of non-resident parents who are self-employed and the resources which should be devoted to ensuring that their maintenance liabilities reflect their ability to pay). • the percentage of cases where the parent with care is on benefit with a positive maintenance outcome, as well as benefit receipt for parents with care and non-resident parents overall. In the current tables this information is always considerably out of date. 	<p>We will investigate the extent to which including information on the gender and employment of clients will add value to the information currently presented in the QSS with a view to inclusion in September 2009 QSS.</p> <p>Due to the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance, methodological work is needed to report on parents receiving benefit. Following work and quality assurance, we will provide headline information in the key facts section.</p>

<p>Case Compliance Information should be retained. We are aware that the Commission's preferred measure of success is 'positive maintenance outcomes' (currently in Table 7.2) and that this measure is used in Secretary of State's targets. Table 7.2, of course, includes all Maintenance Direct arrangements. Such arrangements have little to do with what the statutory maintenance authority does or does not do. Therefore in terms of monitoring the areas where the CSA does have some control over compliance, it is important to look at cases within the Agency's collection service, in order to see whether performance there is improving.</p>	<p>This information has been retained.</p> <p>The CSA provides considerable support and input to customers making Maintenance Direct arrangements and we have enhanced the presentation of this information to include a greater breakdown of the caseload. This will be included in the September 2009 QSS and will enable users to see at a glance and easily calculate case compliance.</p>
<p>Could the Summary of Key Measures table be improved and displayed better across the page?</p>	<p>Action has been taken to better present this information in September 2009 QSS.</p>
<p>Blue Boxes for March 09 aren't consistently straight. Also the Dates within the publication need to be consistent with being horizontally and centrally aligned.</p>	<p>Action taken to better present this information in September 2009 QSS.</p>

What frequency of publication would be most meaningful and appropriate?

Comments Received	Commission Response
<p>The revised Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS) is better focussed and more accessible. Quarterly publication still seems most appropriate. Information provided could be further improved to allow contributions from "critical friends".</p>	<p>No action required</p>

Additional Statistics requested

Comments Received	Commission Response
<p>Deduction from Earnings Orders Statistics showing the amount of non compliance by employers should be produced – together with the number of prosecutions made.</p> <p>Variations/Departures How many variations / departure applications are in place – as balance against the number of applications made?</p> <p>Enforcement It would be helpful to produce information showing the efficacy of different enforcement types – e.g. percentage of applications that are actually successful and result in money recovered for the CSA.</p> <p>Enforcement The number of requests made for bank statements and/or requests made for bank statements directly from banks under the Social Security Fraud Act.</p> <p>Charging Order The CSA has recently started making applications for the sale of a property of an NRP – after a Charging Order has been granted. These are useful statistics which should be disclosed by the CSA and should appear in the QSS.</p> <p>Enforcement Statistics should be provided relating to new powers including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amounts written off • Amounts recovered from estates • Deductions from bank account orders etc. 	<p>We are currently investigating when this information will be available.</p> <p>We recognise the importance of having robust statistics in this area and a programme of work is currently under development.</p> <p>Due to small volumes there may be some issues surrounding data disclosure as well as the fact that rounding may result in reporting to nil.</p> <p>We will report back with a further update regarding statistics on enforcement in 12 months, alongside the September 2010 QSS.</p>
<p>Compliance A recent parliamentary answer gave information that at present does not appear in any table. The answer revealed that in the twelve months to the end of March 2009, 44 per cent of cases were fully compliant; 16 per cent of cases received 70-99 per cent of maintenance due; 18 per cent of cases received less than 70 per cent; and</p>	<p>We will carry out analysis to explore the extent to which breaking down compliance in this way would add value to information currently presented</p>

<p>22 per cent of cases were wholly non-compliant. If possible, we would like to see this information produced on a rolling 12 month basis, to indicate what progress the statutory service is making in improving amounts paid.</p>	<p>in the QSS while ensuring it is relevant to stakeholders.</p> <p>We will explore methodology changes to ensure that such information that can be provided is not misleading to the QSS audience.</p> <p>We will report back with a further update in 12 months, alongside the September 2010 QSS.</p>
<p>Appeals Information about the number of Appeals should be provided (by Scheme). It should be shown how these appeals were resolved i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By discussion / Review • By Tribunal • By Upper Tribunal <p>And should also show the number of cases where the CSA's position was overturned.</p>	<p>We will include information on appeals that have been resolved by discussion/review in September 2009 QSS.</p> <p>We will investigate what Tribunal Service information is available with a view to reporting back with a further update in 12 months, alongside the September 2010 QSS.</p>
<p>Debt It would be helpful to have more complete information from the CSA debt book. We would like information in both table and visual form on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The age of debts; • Debt, split by amount owed (see table in CSA Board's handover report, page 65). 	<p>We are currently unable to report the age of Debt across both schemes as the QSS uses data from the General Ledger which cannot be broken down in this way.</p> <p>We will carry out analysis on splitting the debt by amount owed and investigate the extent to which the internal Debt Book could be utilised and presented in the QSS with a view to</p>

	inclusion in December 2009 QSS.
<p>Compensation Payments Information should be given about the number of compensation applications and the number and amount of compensation payments made.</p>	Information on compensation payments is readily available within our externally published Annual Report and Accounts.
<p>Conversions (Table 2.5) Information should be retained. Although the problem of transitional cases and conversions will gradually disappear from 2011 onwards, it will remain a live issue for the next few years and therefore the figures should still be in the public domain in order that the Agency can be questioned on them.</p>	Over a third of computerised cases requiring conversion have become “stuck” and are now being processed clerically. These clerical cases are currently not included within this table. Analysis has shown that to do so would be extremely costly in terms of both expenditure and time. Hence, robust information on conversions is no longer available.
<p>Logo As this is a Child Support Agency Document - should it be displaying the CSA Logo?</p>	We will work with our colleagues in communications to ensure the correct logo is displayed on the September 2009 QSS.
<p>Complaints Would it be possible for more information on Complaints split between the NRP and PWC and Top Reasons for Complaints, as well as extending the Key Facts to show current month and previous year as a comparison to see where improvements are being made?</p>	Further quarterly information differentiating complaints statistics between NRP and PWC will be included within key facts in September 2009 QSS.

<p>Enforcement (Table 24) This gives figures on the total processes undertaken, rather than the number of NRPs affected or the number of cases this relates to. It would be useful to have this information as well or instead of the number of processes.</p>	<p>We recognise the importance of having robust statistics in this area and a programme of work is currently under development.</p> <p>We will report back with a further update in 12 months, alongside the September 2010 QSS</p>
<p>Enforcement Include statistics on the number Prosecutions for non disclosure of information. The number of applications for Liability Orders made but refused by the court.</p>	<p>This information will be included within the September 2009 QSS.</p>

Table

Key Measures	Includes Clerical
Caseload	Includes Clerical
Intake/Clearances	Excludes Clerical
Uncleared work	Includes Clerical
Time to clear Applications	Includes Clerical
Caseload Status	Includes Clerical
Maintenance Outcomes/Children Benefiting	Includes Clerical
Annual Outcomes/Children Benefiting	Excludes Clerical
Collected and Arranged	Includes Clerical
Maintenance Arrears	Includes Clerical
Enforcement	Includes Clerical
Telephony	Includes Clerical
Clearance Types	Excludes Clerical
Live and Assessed Caseload Status by scheme	Includes Clerical
Maintenance Outcomes/Children by Scheme	Includes Clerical
Reasons for case closure	Excludes Clerical
Local Authority/Parliamentary constituency breakdown	Includes Clerical