

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 444

Child Maintenance Redesign Survey: Indications of future behaviours and choices

A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research on behalf of the
Department for Work and Pensions

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Abbreviations

C-MEC	Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission
CSA	Child Support Agency
CSCS	Child Support Computer System
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
IQCS	Interviewer Quality Control Scheme
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
MD	Maintenance Direct
NRP	Non-resident parent
PWC	Parent with care (or person with care)

Glossary

Application clearance date	The date at which a new case is approved and assessments come into effect.
Assessment	Working out how much child maintenance must be paid. It is also called a child maintenance assessment and a maintenance assessment.
C-MEC	The new non-departmental public body that will replace the Child Support Agency (CSA) and will hold responsibility for all maintenance calculation and enforcement.
Calculation	This is when the CSA works out how much child maintenance must be paid. It is also called a child maintenance calculation and a maintenance calculation.
Child	For child support purposes, someone is a child if they are under 16, or between 16 and 19 and in full-time, non-advanced education (this is doing a course that is not higher than A-level standard).
Child Support Agency	Part of the Department for Work and Pensions, responsible for the calculation, collection and payment of child support maintenance under the Child Support Acts of 1991.
Client	CSA clients include parents with care, persons with care and non-resident parents (NRPs).
Clients on benefit	For the purposes of this survey, clients on benefit are defined as those receiving either Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support.

Compliance	Compliance is assessed as the proportion of current maintenance and arrears actually paid by NRPs against the amounts that are scheduled to be paid.
Maintenance Direct	When the non-resident parent pays child maintenance straight to the person with care (PWC) rather than through the CSA.
Non-resident parent	A parent who lives in a separate household from the PWC and qualifying child(ren) for whom they are liable to pay maintenance under the Child Support Act. Where parents have shared care, the parent who has the children for the shorter period is regarded as the NRP. If the children spend an equal number of nights with each parent then the NRP is the one who is not getting Child Benefit for the children.
Parent with care	A parent (natural or adoptive) who lives in the same household as the child(ren) for whom maintenance is sought. Somebody other than a parent who has day-to-day care of the child(ren) is a person with care.
Type of assessment	<p>The CSA calculates maintenance payments according to the NRP's income. The four rates that are applied to the NRP's income are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• basic rate (income £200 a week or more);• reduced rate (income more than £100 a week but less than £200 a week;• flat rate (income between £5 and £100 a week); and• nil rate (income of less than £5 a week). <p>The maintenance can then be adjusted based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the number of children living with the NRP;• who they or their partner get Child Benefit for;• how many children the NRP needs to pay child maintenance for; and• whether the child stays with the NRP at least one night each week.

Summary

Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions commissioned BMRB Social Research to carry out a survey among Child Support Agency (CSA) clients. The survey assessed clients' likely future behaviour under the new choices available in the forthcoming redesigned child maintenance system. The recent White Paper *A new system of child maintenance* outlined the forthcoming redesign of the child maintenance system, and the survey aimed to establish the likely movement of individuals into the different options.

The survey was carried out during February and March 2007, using a sample of both parents with care (PWCs) and non-resident parents (NRPs) from records held on the CSA's CS2 database. A total of 1,334 telephone interviews were conducted (799 with PWCs and 535 with NRPs) among clients across England, Scotland and Wales.

It is important to note that while the survey asks respondents to predict their future choices, they are doing so on the basis of the limited knowledge that they had at the time of the survey, and without time to consider the options or discuss them with the other parent. The survey data should therefore be seen as indicative of clients' preferences, rather than as an accurate prediction of actual behaviour.

Key findings

- When asked to give their overall preferred option under the new arrangements, one quarter (26 per cent) of PWCs and a half (52 per cent) of NRPs said they would prefer to make their own arrangements.
- PWCs on benefits (Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)) were twice as likely as other PWCs to favour making their own arrangements (36 per cent compared with 18 per cent).
- Clients who were nil-assessed were also more likely than other clients to want to make their own arrangements (37 per cent of nil-assessed PWCs chose this as their preferred option).

- Interest in making own arrangements was also higher than average among Maintenance Direct clients and those with a 'friendly' relationship with the other parent.
- Where PWCs favoured using the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC), they were more likely to say they would do so with a new payment calculation rather than the existing one (37 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). The opposite applied to NRPs, 22 per cent favouring retaining the existing payment and 12 per cent wanting a new calculation.
- There was some support for court-based arrangements (this was the overall preferred option of 11 per cent of PWCs and three per cent of NRPs).

Summary of research

Previous arrangements

Administrative data reveal that, at the time of the survey, around two-fifths (43 per cent) of PWCs were in receipt of IS or JSA. One in eight PWCs (12 per cent) were Maintenance Direct clients.

Two-thirds (66 per cent) of PWCs in the survey said that they had a current payment arrangement in place and three-fifths (61 per cent) of these believed that their arrangement worked well. A similar proportion (86 per cent) of NRPs reported that they had a current payment arrangement with the other parent and, of these, around seven in ten (68 per cent) said it worked well. Maintenance Direct clients were more likely than non-Maintenance Direct clients to say their current arrangement worked well (83 per cent versus 57 per cent for PWCs, 92 per cent versus 65 per cent for NRPs).

Around one half (52 per cent) of PWCs who had made their own arrangements prior to having contact with the CSA thought that this previous arrangement had worked well, compared with around four-fifths (84 per cent) of NRPs.

Preferences under new system

When asked to express their overall preference under the new system, one quarter (26 per cent) of PWCs said they would choose to make their own arrangements, and one in nine (11 per cent) said they would opt for a court-based arrangement. A further one in seven (14 per cent) said they would prefer to use C-MEC but retain their existing payment, and close to two-fifths (37 per cent) stated that they would choose C-MEC but with a new payment calculation. One in eight (12 per cent) PWCs said they did not know what option they would choose.

NRPs were more likely than PWCs to say that their overall preference would be to make their own arrangements (52 per cent). They were also less likely to opt for using C-MEC with a new payment calculation (12 per cent) and a court-based arrangement (only three per cent). However, NRPs were more likely than PWCs to say they would choose C-MEC but retain their existing payment (22 per cent). One in nine (11 per cent) NRPs did not know what option they would opt for.

Making own arrangements

All clients were asked about each of the various options available to them under the new system in turn. When PWCs were asked, firstly, how likely they would be to consider making their own arrangements, one fifth (21 per cent) said they would be very likely to do so.

PWCs who were less likely to consider making their own arrangements were asked whether they might do so if 'help' was provided to make it easier for them (the examples of help given to respondents were face-to-face advice and telephone helplines). When this was factored in, the overall proportion of PWCs who were very likely to consider own arrangements increased to around three in ten (28 per cent).

One half (51 per cent) of NRPs said they would be very likely to consider own arrangements when asked about this option. This proportion increased to 64 per cent when the provision of help was factored in.

Using respondent data, three groups of 'adopters' were identified. The first group – 'likely adopters' – consisted of PWCs who said own arrangements was their overall choice and were 'very' or 'fairly' likely to choose own arrangements (including with help provided), and said their partner would 'definitely' do so as well. On the basis of this definition, 15 per cent of all PWCs can be considered to be likely to make their own arrangements under the new system. The second group – 'unlikely to adopt' – included PWCs who were 'very' or 'fairly' unlikely to say they would consider own arrangements (66 per cent), and the final group – 'uncertain' – comprised all other PWCs (19 per cent).

Using the same definitions for NRPs, three in ten (29 per cent) were 'likely' to adopt own arrangements under the new system; one fifth (21 per cent) were 'unlikely to adopt'; and one half (50 per cent) were 'uncertain'.

Around two thirds of clients (66 per cent of PWCs, 68 per cent of NRPs) who said they were very likely to consider own arrangements would prefer to agree on a regular maintenance payment, whilst around a quarter (27 per cent of PWCs, 28 per cent of NRPs) would opt for a more informal arrangement; the remainder said they would prefer to have no maintenance arrangement at all or did not know what their preferred option was.

The main advantages of making own arrangements mentioned by both PWCs and NRPs were: 'it's easier' and 'you don't have to deal with CSA/C-MEC/government (no interference)'. PWCs were most likely to say the main disadvantages were: 'you can't trust/rely on other parent to make payments'; 'you don't have/want any contact with other parent'; 'the other parent refuses to make payments'. For NRPs, the main disadvantages were: 'you don't have/want any contact with other parent'; 'it's better/more convenient to let organisation (CSA/C-MEC) arrange payments'.

Using C-MEC

When asked, secondly, about whether they would consider using C-MEC under the new system, around two-fifths (43 per cent) of PWCs said they would be very likely to do so compared with 15 per cent of NRPs.

As with making own arrangements, three groups of C-MEC 'adopters' were identified. Close to one half (46 per cent) of PWCs were 'likely' to use C-MEC under the new system (one of the C-MEC options was their overall choice, and they were 'very' or 'fairly' likely to choose C-MEC), compared with one quarter (25 per cent) of NRPs. One quarter (24 per cent) of PWCs were 'unlikely to adopt' C-MEC (very or fairly unlikely to say they would choose C-MEC) against close to one half (46 per cent) of NRPs. Three in ten of all clients were 'uncertain' whether they would use C-MEC.

The main advantage of using C-MEC mentioned by PWCs was that it would be the best way of ensuring payments were made. For NRPs, the main advantages were seen to be that C-MEC with the existing payment allowed for a continuation with the current arrangement and that C-MEC with a new calculation was the fairest approach. Amongst all clients, the most commonly cited disadvantages of using C-MEC were a preference to make own arrangements and a negative experience of using the CSA (often coupled with a belief that C-MEC would therefore not be an improvement).

Court-based arrangements

When asked how likely they would be to consider using a court-based arrangement, 15 per cent of PWCs and seven per cent of NRPs said they would be very likely to consider doing this.

Three quarters (74 per cent) of PWCs who said using a court-based arrangement was their overall preferred choice said this was the best way of ensuring payments are made. Numbers of NRPs choosing a court-based arrangement as their overall preferred option were too small to use in analysis of perceived advantages.

Views of different clients

Clients on benefits

The views of clients who are receiving state benefits are of particular interest, as these clients have been obliged to use the CSA as a condition of benefit receipt. Over a third of PWCs on benefits (36 per cent) said that they would choose to make their own arrangements rather than one of the other options, compared with 18 per cent of other clients (not on benefits). PWCs on benefit were less likely than other clients to prefer C-MEC with a new payment calculation (29 per cent compared with 43 per cent of non-benefit clients).

When asked about the detail of personal arrangements, PWCs on benefits were also more likely to consider an informal arrangement¹ than other PWCs (28 per cent compared with 10 per cent).

Maintenance Direct clients

Clients currently arranging payments through Maintenance Direct were more likely than other clients to favour making their own arrangements: PWCs using Maintenance Direct were more than twice as likely as other PWCs to say they would prefer to make their own arrangements (52 per cent compared with 22 per cent).

The survey was not able to discuss payment arrangements under the new C-MEC options in any detail, and it was therefore clear that most Maintenance Direct clients perceived making their own arrangements as the option that was closest to their current (Maintenance Direct) arrangement.

Value of assessment

Clients who were nil-assessed² were more likely than average to prefer to make their own arrangements, and this applied in particular to PWCs (37 per cent of nil-assessed PWCs favoured making their own arrangements). Among NRPs, the distinction was more related to the value of the assessment: those with a weekly value of £5 or less were more likely than those with an assessment of over £5 to favour making their own arrangements (61 per cent compared with 46 per cent).

Compliance

Compliant NRPs were more likely than average to favour using C-MEC with the existing payment (31 per cent, rising to 35 per cent among those with full compliance). Non-compliant NRPs were similar to average in their overall preferences. A similar pattern applied to PWCs: they were more likely to favour using C-MEC with the existing payment in cases of compliance, in particular full compliance (22 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

Age

Younger PWCs (aged under 30) and those with children under five were more likely to consider making their own arrangements than other PWCs. This may be

¹ Respondents were asked to choose between the options of a 'regular maintenance payment', 'an informal arrangement, for example where you/ the other parent makes an occasional payment such as a household bill, or pays for children's clothes' and 'to have no maintenance arrangement at all'.

² NRPs do not have to pay any maintenance (or are 'nil assessed') if they have an income (from earnings, pension or tax credits) of less than £5 per week.

related to the younger age profile of benefit clients (the latter also being more likely to prefer making their own arrangements). There were no differences by age among NRPs.

Relationship with the other parent

Clients' preferences were greatly influenced by their relationship with the other parent: where the relationship was seen as friendly, the majority of PWCs and NRPs preferred to make their own arrangements, whereas if the relationship was described as 'not friendly', the majority favoured using C-MEC.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In February-March 2007, BMRB carried out a telephone survey of the Child Support Agency's (CSA) clients to assess the likely movement of individuals into the different choices available under the forthcoming redesigned child maintenance system. This report presents the findings from the survey.

The CSA was created in 1993, with the aim of tracing non-resident parents (NRPs), and assessing, collecting, and enforcing maintenance payments. Prior to the formation of the CSA, child maintenance arrangements were settled by the courts, which was seen as an ineffective and inconsistent method for assessing and dealing with child maintenance issues.

The CSA was established after the introduction of the Child Support Act of 1991, which was introduced to help reduce child poverty by establishing the principle that NRPs must meet the responsibility of supporting their child through maintenance payments. Regular maintenance payments are a significant source of financial support for low income households with children where there has been a breakdown in the relationship between the parents, and the Child Support Act and CSA intended to uphold this principle.

However, it was felt reducing costs for the taxpayer were the CSA's primary aim, rather than directly addressing the issue of reducing child poverty. The CSA fell well short of performance expectations, largely due to the difficulties with administering the complex rules of child maintenance, which were also prone to errors and in constant need of updating. Further problems were that parents with care (PWCs) on benefit did not receive any child maintenance from NRPs, since their benefit was reduced by the child maintenance paid. This resulted in a reduced incentive for PWCs on benefit to co-operate with the CSA while many NRPs still refused to pay their full child maintenance liability.

In 2003 a new maintenance system was implemented, based on a much simpler system of calculating maintenance payments³. While this system led to some improvements by increasing levels of compliance, increasing the proportion of PWCs on benefit who received maintenance, and improving value for money in terms of administration costs, the system was far from perfect. As well as the 'new rules' of child maintenance, a brand new computer database system known as CS2 was introduced. There were many IT and administration problems, best expressed by a National Audit Office report that explained: *'Well publicised problems with the new IT system and organisational difficulties, however, have meant that the Reforms have not been implemented effectively, with the result that the [Child Support] Agency has continued to under perform significantly against its targets and large numbers of the Agency's customers have failed to benefit from the new arrangement.'*⁴

In February 2006 the Government decided that a complete redesign of the child maintenance system was needed to address the ongoing problems. Sir David Henshaw then presented a set of recommendations in July 2006 entitled *'Recovering child support: routes to responsibility'* which focused on an overhaul of the CSA, ending the requirement for PWCs on benefit to be treated as applying for child maintenance, promoting the use of own arrangements, and introducing a new body with more enforcement power. The Government first replied to Sir David Henshaw, accepting the vast majority of his recommendations, and went on to publish the White Paper *'A new system for child maintenance'* in December 2006.

The White Paper highlighted four new principles for child maintenance⁵:

- help tackle child poverty
- promote parental responsibility
- provide a cost-effective and professional service
- be simple and transparent.

Following the recommendations by Sir David Henshaw the White Paper outlined the structure of the new system. This involved encouraging parents to make their own arrangements; providing better information and guidance to parents when they split up; ending the system whereby PWCs on benefits are forced to use the CSA; and providing tougher enforcement measures when the NRP fails to make a

³ In the remainder of the report, the new maintenance system is referred to as 'new rules'.

⁴ National Audit Office: Child Support Agency – Implementation of the Child Support Reforms (2006).

⁵ See *'A New System for Child Maintenance'* White Paper, 2006.

payment. A new non-departmental public body known as the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC) would be replacing the CSA and hold responsibility for all maintenance enforcement. The responsibilities of C-MEC include:

- the management of existing cases and chasing debt
- the detailed development and implementation of the new scheme
- providing parents with support on how to make private arrangements or join the new scheme
- managing the transition of cases into private arrangements or between schemes
- the decommissioning of the existing child maintenance scheme and CSA.

Parents who choose to use C-MEC will also have the option to continue with their current maintenance assessment calculation or have it re-assessed under a new, similar but simpler calculation system.

On 6 June 2007 the '*Child Maintenance and other Payments Bill*' was published containing measures to change the system as outlined in the White Paper.

Under the new maintenance system set-out in the White Paper and Bill, PWCs and NRPs together will have the choice of one of four options:

- making their own arrangements without the intervention of the courts or C-MEC
- using C-MEC with their existing payment calculation
- using C-MEC with a new payment calculation
- using court-based arrangements.

1.2 Research objectives

As well as making recommendations for the structure of a new child maintenance system, the Henshaw Report also identified risks associated with making the transition to the new system and recommended that research be carried out to help estimate the flows from the CSA to the options under the new system⁶. The Government's response to the Henshaw Report and the following White Paper agreed that this further research was necessary. This report describes the findings from a survey carried out as part of that programme of research.

The main aim of this survey was to establish the likely behaviour and movement of CSA clients under the various new options available in the forthcoming child maintenance redesign. There is particular interest in the number of clients currently

⁶ See '*Recovering Child Support: Routes to Responsibility*' Sir David Henshaw, 2006, paragraph 84.

using the CSA who may make their own arrangements in the future, and those that will use C-MEC, the new administrative body.

The survey findings aim to inform the roll-out of the new system, by indicating the likely levels of interest in different options and how this varies by different types of client. This will help to resource the future child maintenance service, manage workload and develop policy.

1.3 Research methodology

1.3.1 Sample database

The sample was drawn from the CSA's CS2 database. When the new child maintenance calculation system was introduced in March 2003, a new database was created (known as CS2) that was intended to transfer and convert the cases from the old CSCS database, as well as recording any new cases from that date. However, because of IT problems, there was only a partial conversion of cases from CSCS to CS2. Specifically:

- some cases were successfully transferred from CSCS to CS2 with the new calculation method. These tended to be cases where there was a link to a new case, for example if a PWC already received child maintenance for one child, and then made a new application on or after 3 March 2003 for another child who had a different NRP. In this instance, both cases were included on CS2 with the new calculation method. Similarly, if a NRP had a case in CSCS, and a claim was made against them by a different PWC under the new scheme, then the first case would be converted to the new calculation method;
- some cases 'migrated' to CS2, moving onto the new database but without changing to the new calculation method (i.e. the 'old rules' still applied).
- the remaining cases remained on CSCS and did not transfer onto CS2 at all.

This means that while the Child Support Computer System (CSCS) only includes 'old rules' cases from before March 2003, the new CS2 system has both 'new rules' and 'old rules' cases. At the time that the sample was drawn (November 2006), the overall split of 'old rules' and 'new rules' cases in the CSA population (covering both CSCS and CS2) was 58 per cent 'old rules' and 42 per cent 'new rules'. At the same time, the split in the CS2 database was 42 per cent 'old rules' and 58 per cent 'new rules'. This means that the sample for this survey is slanted towards 'new rules' cases because it is based only on CS2. However, it can be argued that because the 'old rules' cases will decline over time, the focus of the survey on future behaviour makes this a justifiable approach.

It was decided that sampling from the CSCS database was not advisable, as only a five per cent scan sample could be used, and the actual survey sample would then need to be sub-sampled from this. This would make it difficult to ensure a representative sample was drawn from the total population. In addition, addresses

for a sample drawn from CSCS would have had to be looked up manually. This was because at the time the sample was drawn, the scan (Scan 13) that was required to download information from the CSCS system and add it to the Departmental servers was not ready. In the future, it should be easier to access addresses from CSCS (although because they are older cases the address information can be out of date).

1.3.2 Sample selection

When the sample was drawn from the CS2 database, the following cases were excluded from the eligible sample population: individuals with a locally or nationally sensitive marker or a potentially violent indicator; those who have previously been in any Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) sample in the previous three years; and cases involving someone who has died according to the DWP's Departmental Central Index scan.

The sample included both PWCs and NRPs, although we did not attempt to sample matched pairs (i.e. those with the same case number). In total, 2,291 PWCs and 2,154 NRPs were selected using a '1 in n' sample selection. Within the total samples of PWCs and NRPs, the following groups were over-sampled:

- PWCs on benefits, specifically on Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support. This group is of particular interest because they have been obliged to use the CSA in the past but will have the same choices as other clients under the new system. It might therefore be expected that these PWCs will have a stronger interest than other clients in making their own arrangements.
- PWCs and NRPs using Maintenance Direct. At present there are two different methods for paying and receiving child maintenance. The Collection Service involves the CSA collecting the maintenance from the NRP and passing it on to the PWC. The other method, known as Maintenance Direct, involves the CSA making an initial calculation for the level of maintenance paid, and then the NRP paying the maintenance to the PWC directly. The CSA only resumes involvement with the case if requested to do so by one of the parents. Again, these clients were of particular interest, as there was an expectation that their choices may differ from other clients. The numbers of Maintenance Direct clients were therefore boosted in order to examine them separately in the analysis.

Although a telephone look-up was conducted to search for missing numbers, as fieldwork progressed it became apparent that a large proportion (43 per cent) of clients in the sample had invalid telephone numbers⁷. For this reason, a reserve sample of PWCs was drawn part of the way through fieldwork, in order to meet the target numbers of interviews.

Full details of the sample selection are included in Appendix A.

⁷ Invalid telephone numbers consisted of those that were incomplete, had a bad number syntax or error, business numbers or the named respondent was not known at that number.

1.3.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B. The questionnaire was developed by BMRB Social Research in consultation with the DWP.

The questionnaire was divided into general sections as follows:

- current arrangements for child maintenance and whether on benefits
- past arrangements for child maintenance
- preferred choices under new arrangements
- current relationships with other parent
- demographics.

In the section on preferred choices under the new arrangements, respondents were asked a series of questions about each of the options in turn. For each one, interviewers began by reading out a brief explanation of what the option would entail. Once all of the options had been covered, respondents were asked which one, overall, they thought they and the other parent would choose.

1.3.4 Interviewer briefings

All interviewers were briefed personally by the BMRB research team. They were given detailed information on the background to the survey, the sample, introducing the survey, response rates and the questionnaire. This ensured that they had a thorough understanding of the survey. Full written instructions were also provided for all interviewers.

1.3.5 Advance letter

All respondents were sent an advance letter on DWP headed paper before the start of fieldwork. This letter explained the purpose of the study, reasons for their inclusion in the research sample and the form the survey would take, as well as basic information about the options available under the new system. The letters included a freephone number that they could call, or freepost address to write to, if they did not wish to be contacted. A telephone number at BMRB was also provided for customers to contact if they required any further information about the study. Welsh clients were also sent a letter in Welsh. The full advance letter can be found in Appendix C. Those who opted out of the research were removed from the sample.

1.3.6 Fieldwork

Due to time constraints a full pilot was not conducted. However, to test the survey a 'live trial' approach was taken whereby the questionnaire was tested for two days before the main fieldwork started. In the intervening time some minor amendments were made to the questionnaire following interviewer feedback and monitoring by researchers. During the course of the main fieldwork, members of

the research team at BMRB and DWP monitored fieldwork, by listening in to a small percentage of interviews.

All interviews were conducted by fully trained and supervised interviewers, working in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. Data was collected using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing. The live-trial took place on the 7 and 8 February 2007 and the mainstage between the 12 February and 12 March 2007.

In total, 1,334 interviews were carried out, with a response rate of 53 per cent⁸. Response rate details are included in Appendix D.

1.3.7 Quality control measures

For all telephone surveys, BMRB's standard quality control procedures are those stipulated by Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS). As an IQCS member company, our quality control standards meet or exceed those required and our records are available for annual inspection. Our quality control procedures are summarised as follows:

- each interviewer is monitored at least every fourth shift
- at least seven per cent of interviews are monitored
- monitoring records are completed for each interviewer; these are discussed with the interviewer and signed
- no interviews are carried out without a supervisor present
- an interviewer performance review is held each month
- all interviewers are personally briefed on each project.

1.3.8 Analysis and weighting

Once interviews had been conducted, data was collated and open-ended responses were coded. All code frames were approved before use. Tabulations of the data and an SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) dataset were produced and checked.

Weighting has been applied to the data to compensate for the disproportionate sampling that was carried out and to account for non-response. Further details are included in Appendix E.

It should be noted that although the sample information from the CS2 administrative database stated whether an individual was a PWC or NRP, the first question in the survey gave the respondents a chance to agree with this or state that it was incorrect (i.e. the child now lived with the other parent). As such there was a very

⁸ Based on the number of interviews as a proportion of the number of cases 'in scope' of fieldwork (excluding those ineligible or who could not be traced to a current telephone number).

small percentage (less than two per cent) that were classified differently in the survey data than in the sample. Throughout this report, when the base of NRPs and/or PWCs are used, it refers to the survey definition (self definition) rather than the sample (administrative database definition).

The vast majority of respondents agreed that their data could be linked to administrative records held by the DWP. This meant that it was also possible to analyse by variables included in the CS2 database, such as when their case started, the financial value of the assessment and their maintenance compliance.

1.3.9 Structure of the report

The report has been divided into a number of discrete chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides the context of sample characteristics and details of current and previous arrangements
- Chapter 3 looks at clients' overall preferences, both for the total samples of PWCs and NRPs and according to different characteristics.
- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 look at more detail at clients' attitudes to own arrangements (Chapter 4), C-MEC (Chapter 5) and court-based arrangements (Chapter 6).

Chapter 3 includes detailed sub-group analysis for different groups on overall preferences. In the subsequent chapters, sub-group findings are used only where these provide additional information.

1.3.10 Interpretation of findings

When interpreting the survey findings, it should be borne in mind that the survey is based on a sample only, rather than the total population, of CSA clients from the CS2 database. This means that all findings are subject to sampling tolerances. In the report, differences are reported only when they are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

It is also important to note that while the survey asks respondents to predict their future choices, they are doing so on the basis of the limited knowledge that they had at the time of the survey, and without time to consider the options or discuss them with the other parent. The survey data should therefore be seen as indicative of clients' preferences, rather than as an accurate prediction of actual behaviour.

1.3.11 Explanatory notes

The percentages in the report tables do not always add up to exactly 100 for each column. In some instances this is because multiple responses are possible. In all other cases, where the column total may be 99 per cent or 101 per cent, this is simply due to rounding of individual percentages to the nearest whole number.

1.3.12 Table symbols

* Less than 0.5 per cent

0 No observations

– Category not available

.. Data not available

2 Context

This chapter looks at the profile of clients included in the survey, before exploring the current and previous child maintenance arrangements they may have had.

Summary

- Around two-fifths of parents with care (PWCs) were receiving Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) at the time the sample was selected, and 12 per cent were Maintenance Direct clients.
- Thirty one per cent of PWCs and 11 per cent of non-resident parents (NRPs) did not think of themselves as receiving/making any maintenance payments.
- Where respondents said they had payment arrangements, the majority said that they worked very or fairly well (61 per cent of PWCs and 68 per cent of NRPs).
- A quarter (23 per cent) of PWCs said they had made their own maintenance arrangements in the past; the equivalent proportion of NRPs was higher (55 per cent). NRPs were more likely than PWCs to say these arrangements had worked well.

2.1 Client profile

It is important to understand the profile of Child Support Agency (CSA) clients included in the survey as a context in which to examine attitudes and preferences in the remainder of the report.

The information below is taken from the CS2 database for cases that were interviewed in the survey⁹. As with all findings in the report, these are weighted so that they reflect the 'population' of CSA clients included in the CS2 database.

⁹ Administrative data for sampled cases was downloaded in November 2006, so the details covered here relate to this date.

- Around two-fifths (43 per cent) of PWCs were receiving either IS or JSA. For the purposes of the report this will form the definition of PWCs 'on benefit'. A smaller proportion of NRPs were receiving IS, JSA or Incapacity Benefit (23 per cent).
- Just over one in ten (12 per cent) of PWCs were Maintenance Direct clients, with the remaining (88 per cent) being Collection Service clients. A similar proportion (10 per cent) of NRPs were Maintenance Direct clients.
- As explained in the Introduction, although the sample was selected from the CS2 database, a number of clients were still paying/receiving maintenance according to the 'old rules' of before March 2003. Over a third (37 per cent) of PWCs were subject to the 'old rules' of maintenance calculation, while the remainder were subject to the 'new rules'.
- Six in ten (59 per cent) PWCs had only one child that qualified towards child maintenance, while one-third (35 per cent) had two or more.
- A quarter (26 per cent) of PWCs were aged under 30, while 42 per cent were aged between 30 and 39, and 28 per cent were aged 40 or older.

2.2 Current arrangements

2.2.1 Payment arrangements

As noted above, according to the CS2 data 12 per cent of PWCs were Maintenance Direct clients, and the remainder were Collection Service clients. However, we also asked clients as part of the survey how they were supposed to receive or make payments (shown in Table 2.1). This showed that a proportion of clients did not think of themselves as receiving/making any payments (31 per cent of PWCs and 11 per cent of NRPs). Further analysis showed that these cases were mostly either benefit clients (not aware of receiving payments as such), those in nil-assessed cases, and those with nil-compliant NRPs. This information is important to the survey, as it shows that (whatever their administrative status) a proportion of clients do not currently think of themselves as having any maintenance arrangements.

Table 2.1 How clients said they were supposed to receive/make payments from/to other parent

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Paid through CSA	46	49
Given to PWC/children directly	16	26
Included in benefit payment	4*	n/a
Deducted from benefits	n/a	11
Don't receive/need to make any payments	31	11
Don't know	2	3
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>802</i>	<i>535</i>

* Note: only nine per cent of PWCs on benefit reported having maintenance payments included in their benefit payments.

2.2.2 How well current arrangements work

NRPs were more likely than PWCs to say that their current arrangements worked well, as shown in Table 2.2. It should be noted that this table excludes those who said they had no payment arrangements; many PWCs in this category were likely to have been unhappy with their current situation, as indicated by the relatively high proportion interested in court-based arrangements (see Table 3.11).

Table 2.2 How well current arrangement worked

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Very well	30	40
Fairly well	31	28
Not very well	13	12
Not at all well	24	17
Don't know	3	3
<i>Base: All PWCs who had a current payment arrangement</i>	<i>552</i>	<i>486</i>

Maintenance Direct clients were more likely than other clients to say that their current arrangements worked well, and this applied to both PWCs (83 per cent and 57 per cent respectively) and NRPs (92 per cent and 65 per cent respectively).

PWCs on benefits were similar to other PWCs in their assessment of their current arrangements, although a slightly higher proportion said that their current arrangement worked very (as opposed to fairly) well.

PWCs were less likely to say their current arrangements worked well if their cases were nil-assessed or the NRP was nil-compliant. NRPs were more negative about current arrangements if they had a higher financial assessment.

2.2.3 Problems with current arrangements

Respondents who said their current arrangements did not work very well or at all well were asked what problems they had. Various responses were given by both PWCs and NRPs. The most frequently given responses by PWCs were that they 'don't [always] receive [full] payment', 'payment's not [always] on time' and '[non-specific] problems with the CSA'.

The responses most frequently given by NRPs were '[non-specific] problems with the CSA', '[payment] amount not fair/too much' and 'amount calculated was not correct'. Table 2.3 continues the breakdown.

Table 2.3 Problems with current payment arrangement

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Don't [always] receive [full] payment	51	n/a
Payment not [always] on time/delays	32	n/a
Problems with CSA [non-specific]	28	53
Amount not fair/not enough/too much	18	32
Problems/delays in receiving the assessment	13	9
Amount calculated was not correct	9	13
Money comes out of my wages, but PWC isn't receiving [all of] the money	n/a	10
System not fair/don't understand how it works	0	5
Other	8	8
Don't know	1	3
<i>Base: All who thought their current payment arrangement worked not very well or not at all well</i>	177	130

2.2.4 Understanding of current arrangements

Clients who had current payment arrangements were also asked how well they felt they understood the way in which the CSA calculated how much maintenance they should pay/be paid. Findings were similar for PWCs and NRPs; in both cases, clients ranged from those who said they understood the calculation methods very well (18 per cent in each case) to those who did not understand them at all well (21 per cent of PWCs and 29 per cent of NRPs), as shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 How well clients understand the way in which CSA calculates the amount of maintenance to be paid

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Very well	18	18
Fairly well	35	30
Not very well	22	18
Not at all well	21	29
Don't know	5	5
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	802	535

Clients were more likely to say they understood calculation methods if they were 'new rules' clients (both PWCs and NRPs).

2.3 Past arrangements

Around one quarter (23%) of PWCs said they had made their own child support arrangements at some time prior to contact with the CSA, compared with over half (55%) of NRPs. It is not clear why the figure for NRPs is so much higher than for PWCs. A small proportion had experience of other types of arrangement (usually a court-based arrangement), as shown in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Experience of other types of maintenance arrangement prior to contact with the CSA

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Own arrangements	23	55
Other type of arrangement	1	2
No experience of other arrangements	76	43
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	802	535

Maintenance Direct clients were more likely than other clients to have had experience of their own arrangements in the past (44 per cent compared with 20 per cent among PWCs; 73 per cent compared with 53 per cent among NRPs). PWCs on benefits were less likely than other PWCs to have made their own arrangements (16 per cent compared with 28 per cent). Experience of own arrangements was also higher than average among:

- those with a higher financial assessment
- those with a basic rate assessment rather than a flat rate
- more recent cases and those based on 'new rules'.

NRPs with experience of making their own arrangements before the CSA mostly felt that these arrangements worked well (84 per cent said that they worked very or fairly well), as shown in Table 2.6. The views of PWCs were more mixed, with 52 per cent saying their own arrangements had worked very or fairly well, but 48 per cent saying they had not worked very or at all well.

Base sizes are too small to allow sub-group analysis on this question.

Table 2.6 How well own arrangements worked in the past

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Very well	29	55
Fairly well	23	29
Not very well	24	9
Not at all well	24	6
Don't know	0	1
<i>Base: All respondents with experience of own arrangements</i>	190	314

Where respondents said that it had not worked well when they made their own arrangements in the past, they were asked what problems they had experienced. The main problems reported by PWCs were that:

- they did not always receive the full payment
- payments were not always made on time
- they had a disagreement with the other parent.

Among NRPs, the main problems reported were that:

- they had a disagreement with the other parent
- the amount of maintenance was not fair.

Respondents who said it had worked well when they made their own arrangements were asked why they changed. This was either because the PWC started claiming benefits (and therefore had to use the CSA), because there was a change in financial circumstances or because there was a disagreement with the other parent.

3 Overall preferences

This chapter looks at the overall preferences of Child Support Agency (CSA) clients (Sections 3.1 and 3.2), and then examines how these preferences vary according to different characteristics (Section 3.3).

Summary

- There was support from many clients for making own arrangements: a quarter of parents with care (PWCs) and a half of non-resident parents (NRPs) said this would be their preference.
- A half of PWCs said they would choose to use the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC), and this was more likely to be with a new calculation rather than the existing payment. By contrast, NRPs who favoured C-MEC were more likely to want to stick with the existing payment rather than a new calculation.
- There was some support for court-based arrangements (this was the preference of 11 per cent of PWCs).
- PWCs on benefits (Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS)) were twice as likely as other PWCs to say they would make their own arrangements. Other groups who were more likely to want to make their own arrangements were:
 - Maintenance Direct clients (both PWCs and NRPs);
 - PWCs in nil-assessed cases and NRPs with a lower than average financial assessment;
 - clients with more recent claim start dates;
 - younger PWCs;
 - those with a 'friendly' relationship with the other parent;
 - PWCs who said their current arrangement worked well; and
 - clients with experience of making their own arrangements in the past.

3.1 Overall preferences of PWCs and NRPs

As noted in the Introduction, respondents were asked a series of questions about each of the options in turn (these more detailed findings are covered in Chapters 4-6). For each one, interviewers began by reading out a brief explanation of what the option would entail. Once all of the options had been covered, respondents were asked: 'Overall, which option do you think you and the other parent will choose?' This section reports on these overall preferences.

Figure 3.1 shows that one quarter (26 per cent) of PWCs said that their preference would be to make their own arrangements. Around half of PWCs said that they would use C-MEC, with a preference for a new calculation rather than the existing payment (37 per cent compared with 14 per cent). There was some support for court-based arrangements (11 per cent), while the remaining 11 per cent were unable to give a preference.

Figure 3.1 Overall preference – PWCs

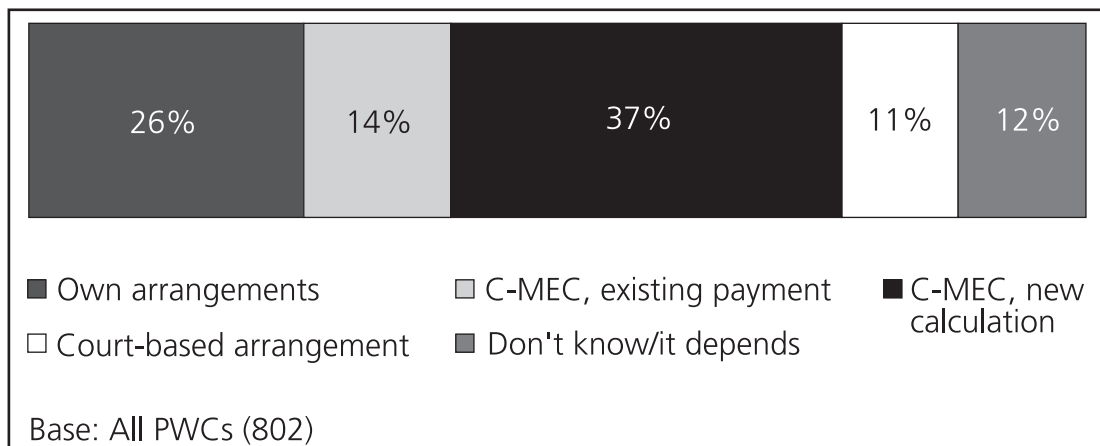
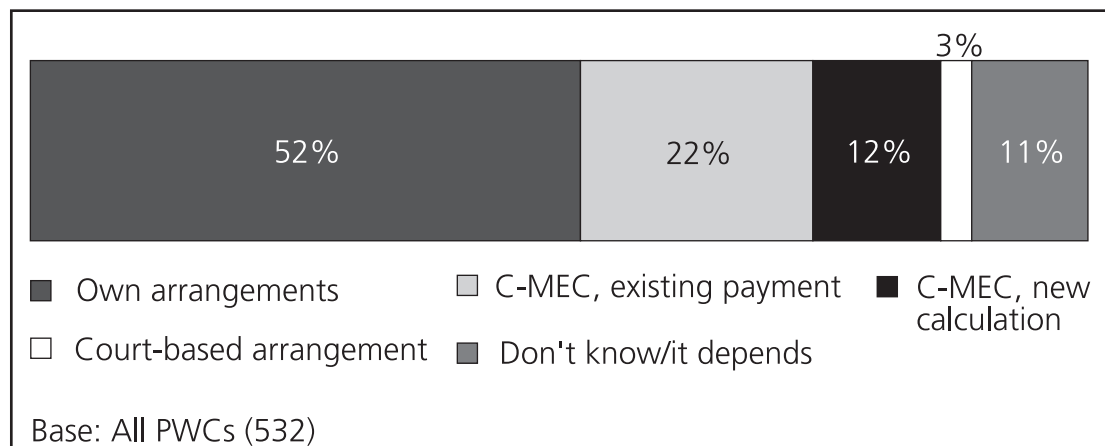


Figure 3.2 shows the overall preferences of NRPs. Around a half (52 per cent) of NRPs said they would make their own arrangements. In contrast to PWCs, when NRPs did favour C-MEC, they preferred retaining the existing payment rather than a new calculation (22 per cent compared with 12 per cent).

Figure 3.2 Overall preference – NRPs



The above analysis shows that NRPs were more interested than PWCs in making their own arrangements. However, because both parents will need to agree to make their own arrangements, the PWC figures are more useful as an indication of likely choices.

3.2 Client groupings

As part of the analysis, it is possible to group respondents according to their level of interest in:

- making their own arrangements; and
- using C-MEC.

These groupings are derived from key questions in the survey on overall preference (as described above) and more detailed questions about making own arrangements or using C-MEC (as discussed in Chapter 4). The groupings have been defined as follows:

- own arrangements:
 - ‘Likely adopters’: own arrangements was their overall choice; and were ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ likely to consider making own arrangements (including with help provided); and said partner would ‘definitely’ do so as well
 - ‘Unlikely to adopt’: very or fairly unlikely to consider making own arrangements
 - ‘Uncertain’: all other respondents
- C-MEC (either with existing payment or new calculation):
 - ‘Likely adopters’: one of the C-MEC options was their overall choice, and ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ likely to use C-MEC
 - ‘Unlikely to adopt’: very or fairly unlikely to use C-MEC
 - ‘Uncertain’: all other respondents.

These groupings are useful, because they combine answers to different questions to give an overall summary of respondents’ likelihood of taking up options. The ‘likely adopters’ groups are the best indicator of future behaviour, as people in these groups express a clear preference over different questions. The ‘unlikely to adopt’ group is also useful as it indicates strong opposition which is likely to remain over time.

The overall proportions in the groups are shown in Table 3.1. This shows that among PWCs, 15 per cent can be described as ‘likely adopters’ of own arrangements, while 66 per cent are unlikely to do this. A greater proportion of NRPs are in the ‘likely adopters’ category (29 per cent). Nearly half of PWCs are likely to adopt C-MEC (46 per cent), while the figure for NRPs is 25 per cent.

Table 3.1 Adopter groups

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Own arrangements:		
Likely adopters	15	29
Uncertain	19	50
Unlikely to adopt	66	21
C-MEC		
Likely adopters	46	25
Uncertain	30	29
Unlikely to adopt	24	46
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	802	535

3.3 Analysis by different characteristics

This section looks at different client characteristics in relation to the overall preference of clients ('overall, which option do you think you and the other parent will choose?'), and also uses analysis of adopter groups, as appropriate, where this provides additional information beyond the overall preference.

3.3.1 PWCs on benefit

As noted in the Introduction, PWCs on benefits (JSA or IS) are of particular interest, as they have previously been obliged to use the CSA. As might be expected, PWCs on benefits were more likely than other PWCs to say they would make their own arrangements (36 per cent compared with 18 per cent), as shown in Table 3.2. They were less likely to favour using C-MEC with a new payment calculation.

Table 3.2 Overall preference of PWCs, by whether on benefits

Categories	Column percentages	
	Benefit	Non-benefit
Own arrangements	36	18
C-MEC with existing payment	13	15
C-MEC with new payment calculation	29	43
Court-based arrangement	11	11
Don't know	11	13
<i>Base: All PWCs</i>	500	299

This pattern is confirmed when examining the adopter groups (Table 3.3), with PWCs on benefits far more likely to be in the group that are likely to adopt own arrangements (24 per cent compared with eight per cent of other PWCs).

Table 3.3 Adopter groups, by whether on benefits

Categories	Column percentages	
	Benefit	Non-benefit
Own arrangements:		
Likely adopters	24	8
Uncertain	23	16
Unlikely to adopt	54	76
C-MEC		
Likely adopters	35	54
Uncertain	33	28
Unlikely to adopt	31	19
<i>Base: All PWCs</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>299</i>

It is also possible to look at sub-groups within the sample of benefit clients. These sub-group variations generally reflect those for clients as whole. Specifically, interest in own arrangements was higher among benefit clients who were aged under 30, with a later application clearance date, where current arrangements were seen as working well, and where the relationship with the other parent was seen as friendly (these issues are discussed in more detail for the sample as a whole in the remainder of the chapter). However, unlike clients as whole, benefit clients on a basic rate were more likely than those on a flat rate to say they would make their own arrangements (31 per cent and 19 per cent respectively were 'likely adopters')¹⁰.

3.3.2 Maintenance Direct clients

Clients who were making payments by Maintenance Direct (according to the CS2 database) were more likely than other clients to favour making their own arrangements. This was true of both PWCs and NRPs (52 per cent and 80 per cent preferred to make their own arrangements), as shown in Table 3.4.

It was not possible to describe to respondents how payments would be made under the new system, and therefore it is likely that Maintenance Direct clients would see making their own arrangements as the option that was closest to the Maintenance Direct system.

¹⁰ The CSA calculates maintenance payments according to the NRP's income. The four rates that are applied to the NRP's income are: basic rate (income of £200 per week or more); reduced rate (income of more than £100 per week but less than £200 per week; flat rate (income of between £5 and £100 per week); and nil rate (income of less than £5 per week). The maintenance can then be adjusted based on: the number of children living with the NRP; who they or their partner get Child Benefit for; how many children the NRP needs to pay child maintenance for; and whether the child stays with the NRP at least one night each week.

Table 3.4 Overall preference, by whether currently using Maintenance Direct

Categories	Column percentages			
	PWC		NRP	
	Maintenance Direct	Other	Maintenance Direct	Other
Own arrangements	52	22	80	49
C-MEC with existing payment	12	14	10	23
C-MEC with new payment calculation	22	39	5	12
Court-based arrangement	3	12	0	3
Don't know	11	12	5	12
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>629</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>400</i>

Table 3.5 confirms that NRPs using Maintenance Direct were very clear in their views, with the majority likely adopters of own arrangements and unlikely to consider C-MEC. The picture for PWCs was less clear cut, although as many as two in five PWCs (39 per cent) were likely adopters of own arrangements.

Table 3.5 Adopter groups, by whether currently using Maintenance Direct

Categories	Column percentages			
	PWC		NRP	
	Maintenance Direct	Other	Maintenance Direct	Other
Own arrangements				
Likely adopters	39	12	63	25
Uncertain	28	18	32	52
Unlikely to adopt	33	70	6	23
C-MEC				
Likely adopters	30	48	9	27
Uncertain	26	31	16	31
Unlikely to adopt	44	22	75	43
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>629</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>400</i>

3.3.3 Value and type of assessment

This section examines clients' preferences according to the weekly financial value of their assessment, as well as the type of assessment (flat, basic or reduced).

This analysis shows that:

- PWCs in nil-assessed cases were more likely than average to choose making their own arrangements as their preferred option (36 per cent). They were also more likely than average to favour court-based arrangements (19 per cent), so this group showed a greater reluctance to use C-MEC than other PWCs.
- Otherwise, preferences did not vary according to the value of the assessment among PWCs.
- Among NRPs, the difference was between those with an assessment of £5 or less (including nil-assessed) compared with an assessment of more than £5, the former being more likely to favour making their own arrangements, as shown in Table 3.6.

In this analysis, it should be noted that PWCs on benefit are more likely than other clients to be in cases where a lower maintenance is required from the NRP. As PWCs on benefit were also more likely to favour making their own arrangements, this may be driving the findings for those with a low financial assessment/nil-assessed clients. However, the small sub-group sizes preclude any regression analysis to investigate this further.

Table 3.6 Overall preference, by weekly financial value of assessment

Categories	Column percentages			
	PWC			
	Zero (nil assessed)	More than 0, up to £5	More than £5, less than £40	£40 or more
Own arrangements	36	22	22	19
C-MEC with existing payment	6	15	19	18
C-MEC with new payment calculation	28	44	44	36
Court-based arrangement	19	9	5	10
Don't know	11	10	10	17
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>198</i>
	NRP			
	Zero (nil assessed)	More than 0, up to £5	More than £5, less than £40	£40 or more
Own arrangements	58	65	44	48
C-MEC with existing payment	14	23	32	19
C-MEC with new payment calculation	10	3	15	16
Court-based arrangement	5	1	1	3
Don't know	12	8	8	14
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>182</i>

Note: Data on weekly financial value of assessment is missing from the CS2 database for 34 PWCs and 48 NRPs.

There was no difference between the preferences of PWCs on different rates (flat, basic or reduced). However, among NRPs those on a flat rate were more likely than those on a basic rate to prefer making their own arrangements (63 per cent compared with 46 per cent), while those on a basic rate were more likely than average to opt for C-MEC with a new payment calculation (17 per cent compared with five per cent on a flat rate).

3.3.4 Compliance

Table 3.7 shows preferences according to whether clients were recorded in the CS2 database as being compliant or nil-compliant. By definition, this analysis excludes Maintenance Direct and nil-assessed clients, and this data is also missing for some clients¹¹.

Among PWCs, there was a stronger preference for court-based arrangements in nil-compliant cases (16 per cent) and a corresponding drop in the proportion favouring C-MEC with the existing payment (12 per cent). Support for C-MEC with the existing payment was higher in compliant cases (22 per cent) and this increased further in cases of full compliance (27 per cent). The proportions favouring own arrangements were similar.

Table 3.7 Overall preference, by whether compliant

Categories	Column percentages			
	PWC		NRP	
	Compliant	Nil-compliant	Compliant	Nil-compliant
Own arrangements	16	19	41	49
C-MEC with existing payment	22	12	31	23
C-MEC with new payment calculation	42	41	15	15
Court-based arrangement	5	16	2	3
Don't know	16	11	12	11
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>243</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>206</i>	<i>60</i>

Note: Table 3.7 excludes Maintenance Direct and nil-assessed clients, as well as those with missing data in the CS2 database (133 PWCs, 93 NRPs).

There were no significant differences among NRPs on overall preference (shown in Table 3.7). However, a greater proportion of nil-compliant NRPs were “likely adopters” of own arrangements (30 per cent compared with 16 per cent of compliant NRPs). It is also possible to examine cases with full rather than partial compliance, and this shows that on overall preference, fully compliant NRPs were less likely to favour making their own arrangements (34 per cent) and more likely to want to use C-MEC with the existing payment (35 per cent).

¹¹ Compliance by the NRP cannot be gauged in Maintenance Direct cases, because the CSA is not involved in ensuring payments are made. It does not apply to nil-assessed cases because no payment is required.

3.3.5 Date of application

Table 3.8 examines clients' preferences in relation to the date in which the case started, specifically the application clearance date. This shows that clients with more recent cases (with an application clearance date in 2006) were more likely to favour making their own arrangements.

In addition, PWCs with an application clearance date before March 2003 were least likely to opt for C-MEC with the existing payment, and this option also had less support among clients whose case was governed by old rather than new rules.

More generally, those with a case governed by new rules were more 'likely to adopt' one of the C-MEC options, as were those with a clearance start date of between March 2003 and the end of 2005.

Table 3.8 Overall preference, by application clearance date

Categories	Column percentages					
	PWC			NRP		
	Pre March 2003	March 2003 until end 2005	2006	Pre March 2003	March 2003 until end 2005	2006
Own arrangements	24	23	32	49	51	58
C-MEC with existing payment	10	18	17	21	27	18
C-MEC with new payment calculation	38	40	30	15	13	8
Court-based arrangement	13	8	11	4	1	2
Don't know	14	11	10	12	7	15
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>251</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>137</i>

Note: Data on application clearance date is missing from the CS2 database for 34 PWCs and 48 NRPs.

3.3.6 Age and age of children

Younger PWCs were more likely to favour making their own arrangements, as shown in Table 3.9. Related to this, interest in making own arrangements was also higher amongst PWCs with a youngest child under five (34 per cent); these PWCs (with a youngest child under five) were also more likely than average to favour C-MEC with the existing payment (20 per cent).

The 'adopter' groups indicate that PWCs aged under 30 and with a youngest child under five were more likely than other PWCs to be in the 'uncertain' group; the proportions in the 'likely to adopt own arrangements' group were similar to older age groups. This suggests that while younger PWCs expressed an interest in making their own arrangements, they were not always committed to this option, and may therefore need more information or help than other clients in order to make a decision.

There were no significant differences among NRPs in terms of age or age of youngest child.

Younger PWCs and those with younger children were more likely than average to have a 'friendly relationship' with the other parent, a group that was particularly likely to favour making their own arrangements (see below in Section 3.3.7). This is therefore likely to have had an impact on the variations by age noted here.

Table 3.9 Overall preference, by age band

Categories	Column percentages					
	PWC			NRP		
	Under 30	30-39	40+	Under 30	30-39	40+
Own arrangements	33	25	19	50	53	51
C-MEC with existing payment	17	13	14	26	20	24
C-MEC with new payment calculation	29	38	44	12	13	13
Court-based arrangement	11	10	13	2	4	1
Don't know	9	15	11	11	11	10
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>324</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>181</i>

Note: Data on age is missing from the CS2 database for 35 PWCs and 48 NRPs.

3.3.7 Relationship with other parent

One of the main factors that differentiate clients' preferences is the relationship with the other parent. Over half of PWCs and NRPs who described their relationship as 'very or quite friendly' said they would favour making their own arrangements (63 per cent) and, looking beyond the figures in Table 3.10, this is even higher when the relationship is described as 'very friendly' (with 79 per cent of PWCs and 82 per cent of NRPs saying they would choose to make their own arrangements). This is in strong contrast to clients who describe the relationship as not friendly or who have no contact with the other parent, as shown in Table 3.10.

In the 'adopter' groupings (as described in Section 3.2), almost all PWCs who described their relationship as 'not friendly' were unlikely to adopt their own arrangements (87 per cent).

Table 3.10 Overall preference, by relationship with the other parent

Categories	Column percentages					
	PWC			NRP		
	Friendly	Not friendly/ no contact	Mixed	Friendly	Not friendly/ no contact	Mixed
Own arrangements	63	9	22	72	27	52
C-MEC with existing payment	13	11	20	16	30	23
C-MEC with new payment calculation	16	48	37	7	19	11
Court-based arrangement	1	17	9	*	6	2
Don't know	7	15	11	6	19	12
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>223</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>124</i>

3.3.8 Marital status at time of relationship

PWCs who were married at the time of their relationship were less likely than other PWCs to favour making their own arrangements (20 per cent) and more likely to opt for C-MEC with a new calculation (43 per cent). There were no differences among NRPs.

3.3.9 How well current arrangements work

PWCs who said that their current arrangement works well were more likely than other PWCs to favour making their own arrangements, and were also more likely than average to say they would opt to use C-MEC with the existing payment. Where the current arrangements were not thought to be working well, PWCs were more likely to favour using C-MEC with a new payment calculation. PWCs who said they had 'no arrangement' were more likely than other PWCs to favour a court-based arrangement.

Among NRPs, where the current arrangement was seen as working well, respondents were more likely to opt for using C-MEC with the existing payment, but were no more likely to favour making their own arrangements.

Base sizes are too small to analyse by individual problems raised by respondents in relation to their current arrangements (see Section 2.2.3 for details of these problems). However, the overall pattern suggests that, for PWCs, problems with current arrangements (often relating to lack of or late payments) generally discouraged them from wanting to make their own arrangements, and may make them more receptive to the greater enforcement powers under C-MEC.

Table 3.11 Overall preference, by how well current arrangement works

Categories	Column percentages					
		PWC			NRP	
	Works well	Does not work well	No arrangement	Works well	Does not work well	No arrangement
Own arrangements	35	11	26	53	51	58
C-MEC with existing payment	22	14	5	27	19	5
C-MEC with new payment calculation	27	54	37	9	17	14
Court-based arrangement	3	11	20	1	2	11
Don't know	13	10	12	10	10	14
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>355</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>49</i>

3.3.10 Experience of own arrangements in the past

Table 3.12 shows that clients who have had experience of making their own arrangements in the past were more likely to say this would be their preferred option in the future; this applied to both PWCs and NRPs. However, the differences are less pronounced than for other sub-groups (e.g. benefits, Maintenance Direct and relationship with the other parent).

Table 3.12 Overall preference, by whether had experience of own arrangements in the past

Categories	Column percentages			
	PWC		NRP	
	Experience of own arrangements	No experience	Experience of own arrangements	No experience
Own arrangements	33	24	58	46
C-MEC with existing payment	14	14	21	23
C-MEC with new payment calculation	36	37	10	13
Court-based arrangement	6	12	1	4
Don't know	12	12	9	14
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>609</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>221</i>

3.3.11 Level of understanding of CSA calculations

Clients' perceived understanding of the way in which the CSA calculates maintenance payments had little effect on their preferences. Clients who said they did not understand calculations very or at all well were less likely to be able to make a choice (i.e. they tended to say 'don't know'), but otherwise the only difference was that, among NRPs, clients who expressed a good understanding of CSA calculations were more likely to favour using C-MEC with the existing payment.

4 Own arrangements

Chapter 3 examined clients' overall preferences for maintenance arrangements. This chapter examines in more detail the level of interest shown by parents in making their own arrangements under the new system, as well as looking at the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this option.

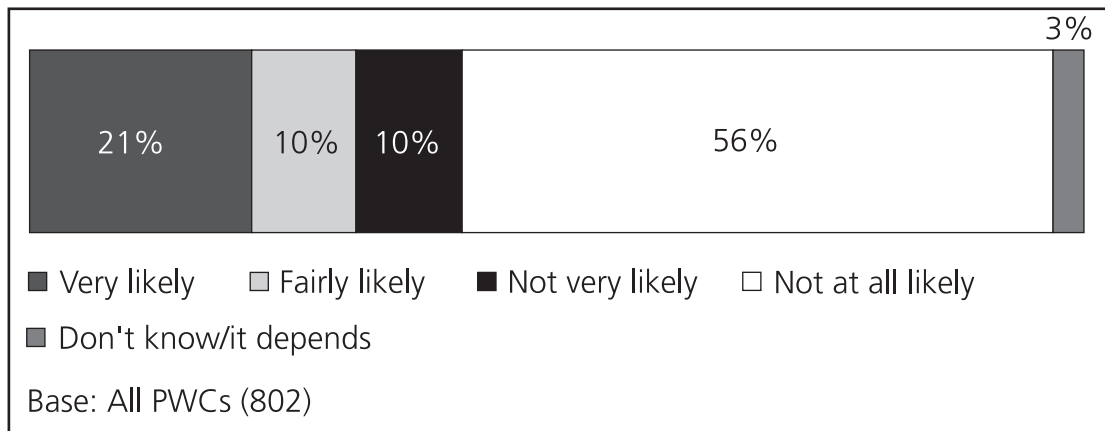
Summary

- One fifth (21 per cent) of parents with care (PWCs) said they would be very likely to make their own arrangements compared with one half (51 per cent) of non-resident parents (NRPs).
- The provision of help increases the proportion of clients who would be very likely to consider own arrangements by seven per cent for PWCs (from 21 to 28 per cent) and 13 per cent for NRPs (from 51 to 64 per cent).
- Around one in six (17 per cent) of all PWCs said that they were very likely to consider own arrangements (if help were provided) *and* they also believed the other partner would definitely be willing to adopt this approach as well.

4.1 Level of interest

4.1.1 Parents with care

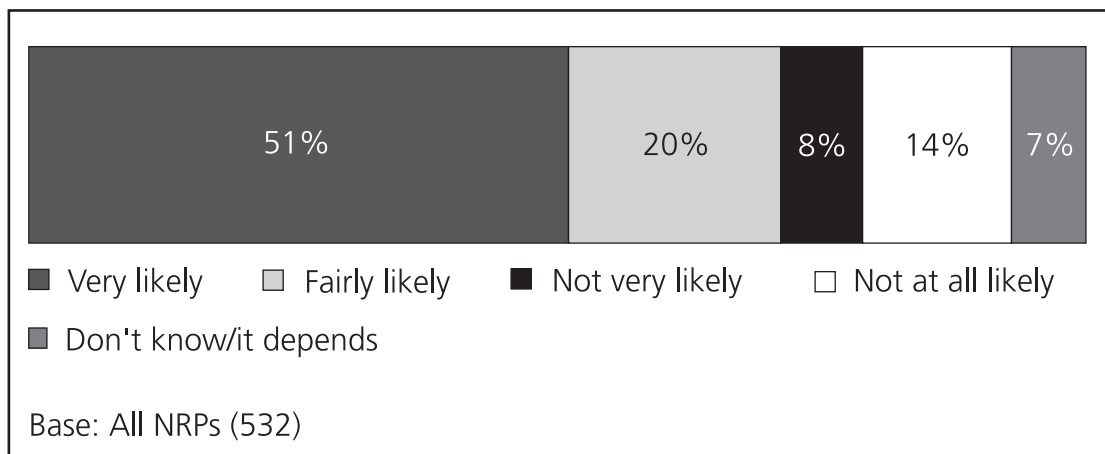
When PWCs were asked how likely they would be to consider making their own arrangements, one fifth (21 per cent) said they would be very likely to do so. Figure 4.1 shows the results in full.

Figure 4.1 How likely to consider own arrangements – PWCs

As outlined in the previous chapter on overall preferences, PWC benefit clients were more likely than non-benefit clients to say that they were very likely to consider own arrangements (30 versus 14 per cent), as were Maintenance Direct clients (44 per cent, 18 per cent non-Maintenance Direct).

4.1.2 Non-resident parents

NRPs were more likely to favour making their own arrangements than PWCs. When asked about this option, one half (51 per cent) of NRPs said they would be very likely to consider own arrangements. Figure 4.2 provides the figures in detail.

Figure 4.2 How likely to consider own arrangements – NRPs

Again, Maintenance Direct clients were more likely than non-Maintenance Direct clients to say that they would be very likely to consider own arrangements (78 versus 48 per cent).

4.2 Impact of providing help

Clients who were less likely to consider making their own arrangements were asked, "If help was provided to make it easier for parents to make their own arrangements – for example, face-to-face advice or telephone helplines – how likely would you be to consider making your own arrangements?"

When the provision of help was factored in, the overall proportion of PWCs who were very likely to consider own arrangements increased from one fifth (21 per cent) to around three in ten (28 per cent). Looking at the key sub-groups:

- the proportion of PWC benefit clients who said that they were very likely to consider own arrangements when the provision of help was taken into account increased from three in ten (30 per cent) to around two-fifths (38 per cent);
- for Maintenance Direct clients, the impact of providing help accounted for an increase from 44 per cent to 55 per cent amongst those who said they would be very likely to make their own arrangements.

The impact of providing help was even greater amongst NRPs. The proportion of NRPs who felt that they would be very likely to make their own arrangements when help was factored in increased by 13 per cent to around two thirds (64 per cent). Looking at NRP Maintenance Direct clients, the provision of help increased the proportion who said that they would be very likely to consider own arrangements from around four-fifths (78 per cent) to around nine in ten (87 per cent).

Parents who said they would be likely, or more likely, to make their own arrangements if help were provided were then asked which types of help they would be interested in from a prompted list. A service to calculate the amount of child maintenance was the type of help PWCs were most interested in (80 per cent), whereas NRPs' most preferred option was a telephone helpline (76 per cent). Table 4.1 shows the results in detail.

Table 4.1 Types of help interested in

Categories	Multiple responses	
	PWC	NRP
A service to calculate the amount of child maintenance	80	72
A telephone help-line	75	76
A service to formally record private agreements and payments made	67	68
Face-to-face meetings	60	65
Mediation services to help parents reach an agreement	56	66
Other	4	3
Don't know/no answer	4	1
<i>Base: If likely, or more likely, to consider own arrangements with help provided</i>	229	165

PWC clients not claiming benefits were more likely than those on benefits to say they would be interested in the various services, specifically a service to calculate child maintenance (88 versus 73 per cent) and a service to formally record private agreements (76 versus 58 per cent). This may indicate that PWCs who are not on benefits may need more help than benefit clients before they commit to making their own arrangements. The figures were too small to allow for analysis of Maintenance Direct clients.

4.3 Impact of other partner

Among PWCs who said they would be very likely to make their own arrangements if help were provided, three-fifths (61 per cent) thought that the other parent would also definitely consider this option under the new system (whilst the other 31 per cent said 'possibly', 'no' or 'don't know'). This means that around one in six (17 per cent) of all PWCs said that they were very likely to consider own arrangements (if help were provided) and they also believed the other partner would definitely be willing to adopt this approach as well.

By comparison, around a third (35 per cent) of all NRPs said that they were very likely to consider own arrangements (if help were provided) *and* they also thought the other partner would definitely be willing to do so as well. However, as both parents would need to agree to make their own arrangements under the new system, the lower figure of one in six derived from PWC responses is the more accurate indicator of intentions.

4.4 Type of own arrangement preferred

All respondents (except those who said they were not at all likely to make their own arrangements) were asked which of three options they would prefer if they did make their own arrangements. Table 4.2 is restricted to those who said they were very likely to consider their own arrangements, as this focuses the analysis on the most relevant clients. Around two thirds of these clients (66 per cent of PWCs, 68 per cent of NRPs) said they would prefer to agree on a regular maintenance payment, whilst around a quarter (27 per cent of PWCs, 28 per cent of NRPs) would opt for a more informal arrangement; the remainder said they would prefer to have no maintenance arrangement at all or did not know what their preferred option was. Table 4.2 shows the figures in full.

Table 4.2 Type of arrangement preferred

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Agree a regular maintenance payment	66	68
Have an informal arrangement, for example where you make/the other parent makes an occasional payment such as a household bill, or pays for children's clothes	27	28
Have no maintenance arrangement at all	5	2
Don't know/no answer	2	2
<i>Base: If very likely to consider own arrangements with help provided</i>	166	165

Clients who said that their current arrangement worked well were more likely than other clients to state that they would prefer to agree a regular maintenance payment (82 versus 53 per cent for PWCs, 72 versus 60 per cent for NRPs), but less likely to want to opt for an informal arrangement (16 versus 32 per cent for PWCs, 23 versus 46 per cent NRPs).

It is not possible to identify differences between benefit and non-benefit PWC if the analysis is restricted to those who were very likely to consider their own arrangements. However, if it is extended to include those who were fairly likely to do so, we can see that PWCs on benefits were more likely than non-benefit PWCs to prefer an informal arrangement (29 per cent compared with 13 per cent).

PWCs who said they were very likely to consider own arrangements and would prefer *to agree on a regular maintenance payment* most commonly said they preferred this approach because they needed a regular payment (41 per cent), it is easier (28 per cent) and it is the best way to get some money/help (24 per cent). NRPs most commonly cited the same reasons but in different proportions: easier (39 per cent); best way to get some money/help (21 per cent); need regular payment (17 per cent).

PWCs who said they were very likely to consider own arrangements and would prefer *an informal arrangement* most commonly said they preferred this approach because it is easier (49 per cent) and it is the best way to get some money/help (21 per cent). For NRPs, the same reasons were also most commonly given (although in different proportions): easier (28 per cent) and best way to get some money/help (26 per cent); one fifth (20 per cent) also mentioned that they preferred an informal arrangement because they knew the payment went to the child.

4.5 Advantages and disadvantages

Once clients had been presented with all the options available to them under the new system they were asked what they thought the advantages were of their overall preferred option. Table 4.3 shows the most commonly mentioned advantages of making own arrangements given by clients who said they would choose this option.

Table 4.3 Advantages of making own arrangements

<i>Multiple responses</i>		
Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Easier	44	36
Don't have to deal with CSA/C-MEC/government/no interference	18	28
Best way of ensuring payments are made	13	10
Prefer to continue with current arrangement	13	9
Other parent will agree to it	12	9
Best for both parents/keeps other parent happy	12	8
Fairest system	12	13
<i>Base: If own arrangements overall preferred choice</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>279</i>

For all clients, the most commonly mentioned advantage of making own arrangements was that it is easier (44 per cent PWC and 36 per cent NRP said this). Around one fifth (18 per cent) of PWCs and around three in ten (28 per cent) NRPs said that a merit of own arrangements was that it did not involve dealing with the Child Support Agency (CSA), the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC) or the government.

There were no significant differences apparent amongst clients on benefit or Maintenance Direct for either PWCs or NRPs.

Table 4.4 shows the most commonly mentioned disadvantages of making own arrangements given by clients who did not choose this option.

Table 4.4 Disadvantages of making own arrangements

<i>Multiple responses</i>		
Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Can't trust/rely on other parent to make payments	36	8
Don't have/want any contact with other parent	31	33
Other parent refuses to make payments	25	5
Better/more convenient to let organisation (CSA/C-MEC) arrange payments	6	16
Hasn't worked in the past	5	*
Want to minimise contact with other parent	4	8
Other parent wouldn't agree	1	8
<i>Base: If own arrangements not overall preferred choice</i>	<i>497</i>	<i>193</i>

PWCs were most likely to say that they would not make their own arrangements because they 'can't trust/rely on other parent to make payments' (36 per cent), followed by 'don't have/want contact with other parent' (31 per cent) and 'other parent refuses to make payments' (25 per cent). NRPs were most likely to say

'don't have/want contact with other parent' (mentioned by 33 per cent), followed by 'better/more convenient to let organisation (CSA/C-MEC) arrange payments' (16 per cent said this).

Again, there were no significant differences apparent amongst clients on benefit or Maintenance Direct for either PWCs or NRPs.

4.6 What would influence clients?

All clients were asked if, when they actually need to choose one of the options available to them under the new system, their decision would be affected by certain factors from a prompted list. Overall, 63 per cent of PWCs said that their decision would be affected by the enforcement measures that would be in place to ensure payments are made, 57 per cent by the information and guidance they would receive and 45 per cent by the arrangement which pays the largest or smallest amount. Table 4.5 shows the results in full for both PWCs and NRPs.

PWCs whose favoured option was own arrangements were less likely than those who preferred C-MEC or a court-based arrangement to say their decision would be affected by any of the prompted factors: enforcement measures (45 versus 60 per cent); information and guidance (50 versus 60 per cent); actual payments (39 versus 47 per cent). This is not surprising, as these items (enforcement measures in particular) are less relevant for people intending to make their own arrangements.

Related to this (because benefit clients were more likely to want to make their own arrangements), PWCs on benefits were less likely than non-benefit clients to state that enforcement measures would influence their choice (55 per cent against 69 per cent non-benefit clients). They were also less likely to believe advice and guidance would affect their decision (53 per cent compared with 61 per cent).

A similar proportion of NRPs said their overall decision would be influenced by information and guidance (58 per cent) and actual payments (47 per cent). However, NRPs were much less likely than PWCs to state that their decision would be affected by enforcement measures (39 per cent). Again, this is likely to be because NRPs are more likely than PWCs to opt for making their own arrangements; as noted above, enforcement measures are less relevant for people intending to do this.

As with PWCs, NRPs whose favoured option was own arrangements were less likely than those who preferred C-MEC or a court-based arrangement to say their decision would be affected by any of the prompted factors: information and guidance (50 versus 67 per cent); actual payments (39 versus 56 per cent); enforcement measures (36 versus 52 per cent).

NRP Maintenance Direct clients were less likely than non-Maintenance Direct clients to think either information and guidance (45 versus 60 per cent) or actual payments (32 versus 48 per cent) would affect their choice. Again, these findings

are correlated, as Maintenance Direct clients were more interested than other clients in making their own arrangements.

Table 4.5 What would influence clients

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Enforcement measures	63	39
Information and guidance	57	58
Actual payments	45	47
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>802</i>	<i>532</i>

Multiple responses

5 C-MEC

This chapter looks at the level of interest shown by parents in using the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC), as well as looking at the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this option.

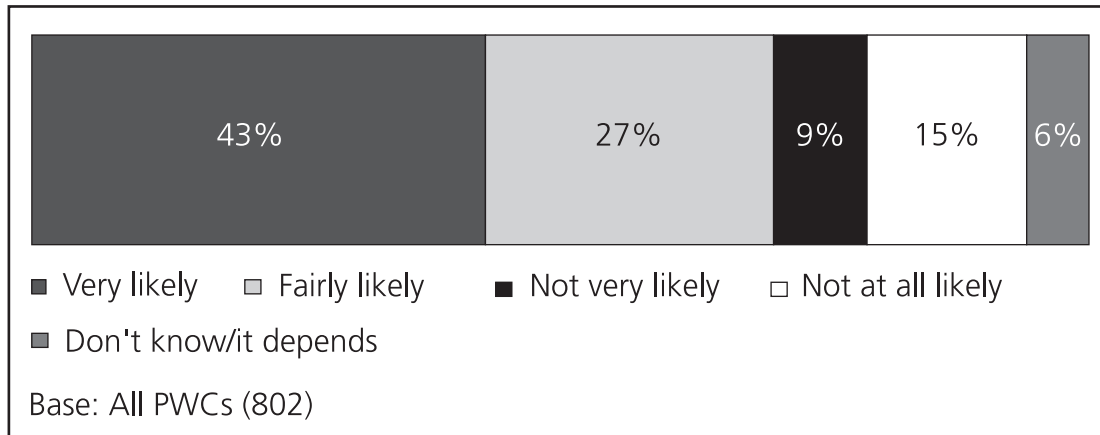
Summary

- Around two-fifths (43 per cent) of parents with care (PWCs) said they would be very likely to use C-MEC compared with 15 per cent of non-resident parents (NRPs).
- Amongst PWCs who were likely to use the new organisation, two-thirds (65 per cent) said they would prefer to receive a payment on a new calculation, whilst a quarter (24 per cent) said they would favour retaining the existing maintenance payment. By comparison, one half (51 per cent) of NRPs would opt to keep the existing maintenance payment; around two-fifths (38 per cent) of NRPs would make a payment based on a new calculation.

5.1 Level of interest

5.1.1 PWCs

When PWCs were asked how likely they would be to consider using C-MEC – either with their existing maintenance payment or with a new payment calculation – around two-fifths (43 per cent) said they would be very likely to do so. Figure 5.1 shows the results in full.

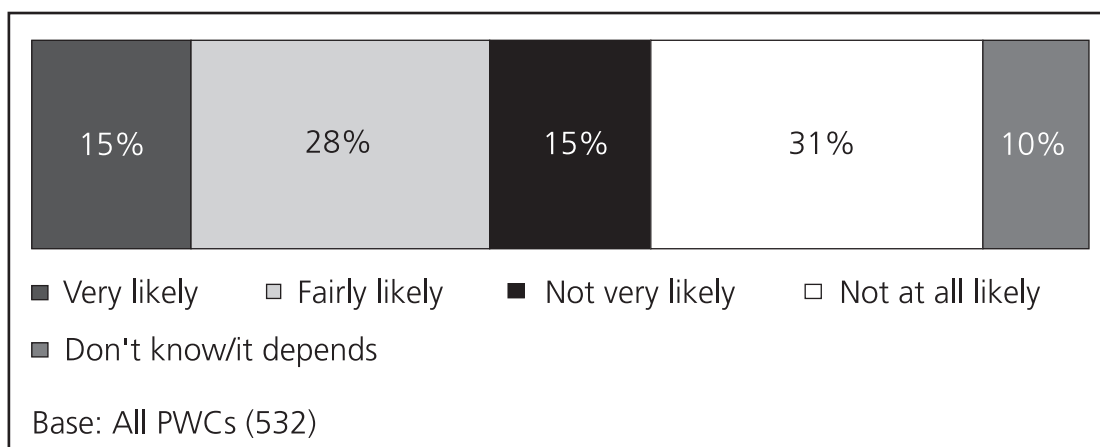
Figure 5.1 How likely to consider using C-MEC – PWCs

As noted earlier, benefit and Maintenance Direct PWCs were keener on making their own arrangements and less likely to favour C-MEC. One third (32 per cent) of PWC benefit clients said they were very likely to use C-MEC against one half (51 per cent) of non-benefit clients. One in three (29 per cent) PWC Maintenance Direct clients said they were very likely to consider using C-MEC compared with 45 per cent of non-Maintenance Direct clients.

When PWCs who said they were likely to use the new organisation were asked which of the two C-MEC options they would prefer, two-thirds (65 per cent) said receiving a payment on a new calculation, whilst a quarter (24 per cent) said keeping the existing maintenance payment. The remaining 11 per cent either said it depended or that they did not know.

5.1.2 NRPs

NRPs were much less likely to favour using C-MEC than PWCs. When asked about this option, 15 per cent of NRPs said they would be very likely to consider C-MEC. Figure 5.2 provides the figures in detail.

Figure 5.2 How likely to consider using C-MEC – NRPs

NRP non-Maintenance Direct clients were around twice as likely as Maintenance Direct clients to say they would be likely to consider using C-MEC (46 versus 21 per cent).

There were no significant differences between NRPs who said their current arrangement works well and other NRPs.

One half (51 per cent) of NRPs who said they were likely to use C-MEC would opt to keep the existing maintenance payment (compared with a quarter of PWCs), whereas around two-fifths (38 per cent) would make a payment based on a new calculation (compared with two-thirds of PWCs). The remaining 12 per cent either said it depended or that they did not know.

5.2 Impact of other partner

Among PWCs who said they would be very likely to consider C-MEC and would opt for retaining the existing maintenance payment (rather than for a new calculation), one third (32 per cent) thought that the other parent would also definitely consider this option under the new system. A similar proportion (36 per cent) said 'possibly', whilst the remaining third (32 per cent) said 'no' or 'don't know'.

By comparison, two-fifths (40 per cent) of NRPs who said they would be very likely to consider C-MEC and would opt for retaining the existing maintenance payment thought that the other parent would also definitely consider this option. A further one quarter (24 per cent) said 'possibly', whilst the remaining 37 per cent said 'no' or 'don't know'.

5.3 Advantages and disadvantages

Clients who said C-MEC was their overall preference were then asked what they thought the advantages were of this option. The results varied depending on whether clients preferred C-MEC with the existing payment or with a new payment calculation. Table 5.1 shows the most commonly mentioned advantages of using C-MEC with the existing payment given by clients who said they would choose this option.

Table 5.1 Advantages of using C-MEC with existing payment

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Best way of ensuring payments are made	25	17
Prefer to continue with current arrangement	21	25
Easier	16	24
Can avoid contact with other parent	12	13
Fairest system	5	12
<i>Base: If C-MEC with existing payment overall preferred choice</i>	113	117

Multiple responses

For PWCs, the most commonly mentioned advantage of using C-MEC with the existing payment arrangement was that it would be the best way of ensuring payments are made (25 per cent said this). For NRPs, the key merit of using C-MEC with the existing payment arrangement was simply that it would effectively allow them to continue with their current arrangement (25 per cent said this).

The figures were too small to allow for detailed analysis of benefit and Maintenance Direct clients.

Table 5.2 shows the most commonly mentioned advantages of using C-MEC with a new payment calculation given by clients who said they would choose this option.

Table 5.2 Advantages of using C-MEC with new payment calculation

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Best way of ensuring payments are made	49	16
Fairest system	21	36
Will get highest payment	9	4
Quickest way of making/receiving payments	7	2
Easier	5	6
Can avoid contact with other parent	5	2
Will get lowest payment	1	11
<i>Base: If C-MEC with new payment calculation overall preferred choice</i>	297	62

One half (49 per cent) of PWCs said that the main advantage of using C-MEC with a new payment arrangement was that it would be the best way of ensuring payments are made. For NRPs, the most commonly mentioned advantage was that it would be the fairest system (36 per cent said this).

There were no significant differences apparent amongst clients on benefit or Maintenance Direct for either PWCs or NRPs.

Table 5.3 shows the most commonly mentioned disadvantages of using C-MEC given by clients who did not choose this option.

Table 5.3 Disadvantages of using C-MEC

Categories	Column percentages	
	PWC	NRP
Prefer own arrangements	27	38
Negative experience of CSA/don't think C-MEC will be any better	19	22
Don't/wouldn't need it	15	17
<i>Base: If C-MEC not overall preferred choice</i>	295	293

For all clients, the most commonly mentioned disadvantage of using C-MEC was that clients would prefer to make their own arrangements (27 per cent PWC and 38 per cent NRP said this). Around one fifth said that they had a negative experience of the CSA and / or did not think C-MEC would be any better (19 per cent PWC, 22 per cent NRP). Fifteen per cent of PWCs and 17 per cent of NRPs said they would not need to use C-MEC. All other disadvantages were mentioned by fewer than ten per cent of clients.

6 Court-based arrangements

This chapter examines the level of interest shown by parents in using a court-based arrangement, as well as looking at the perceived advantages of this option.

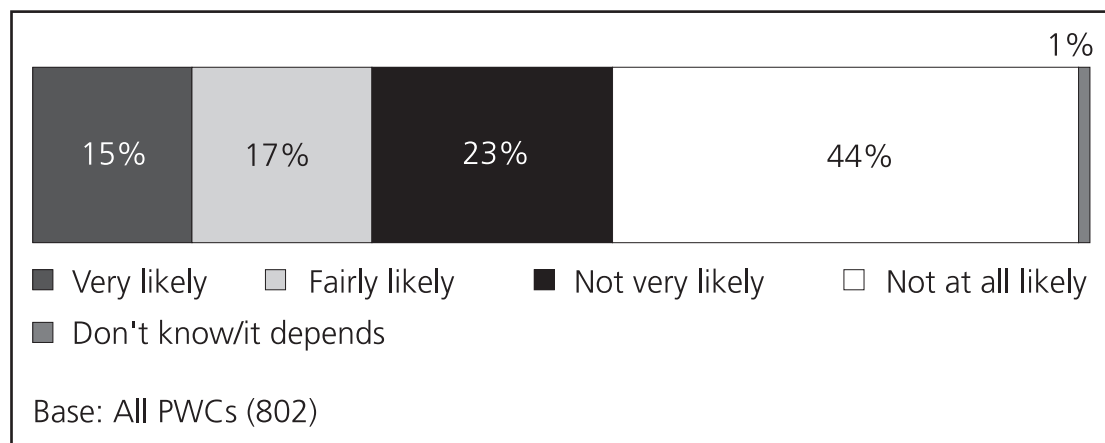
Summary

- Fifteen per cent of parents with care (PWCs) said they would be very likely to use a court-based arrangement compared with seven per cent of non-resident parents (NRPs).
- The main advantage of a court-based arrangement – mentioned by three-quarters (74 per cent) of PWCs – was that it was the best way of ensuring payments are made.

6.1 Level of interest

When PWCs were asked how likely they would be to opt for maintenance payments through a court order, 15 per cent said they would be very likely to do so. Figure 6.1 shows the results in full.

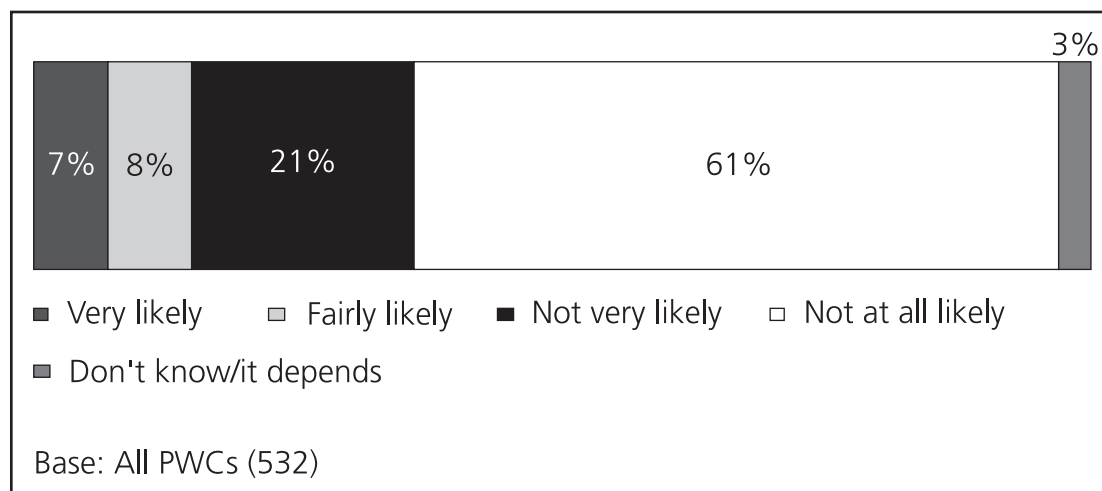
Figure 6.1 How likely to consider using a court-based arrangement – PWCs



One fifth (21 per cent) of PWC Maintenance Direct clients said they would be likely to consider a court-based arrangement compared with one third (33 per cent) of non-Maintenance Direct clients.

NRPs were less likely to favour a court-based arrangement. When asked about this option, seven per cent of NRPs said they would be very likely to give it consideration. Figure 6.2 provides the figures in detail.

Figure 6.2 How likely to consider using a court-based arrangement – NRPs



Again, Maintenance Direct clients were less likely than non-Maintenance Direct clients to say that they would be likely to consider a court-based arrangement (five versus 15 per cent).

6.2 Advantages

Clients who said that using a court-based arrangement was their overall preference under the new system were subsequently asked what they thought the advantages were of this option.

The main advantage of a court-based arrangement – mentioned by three-quarters (74 per cent) of PWCs – was that it was the best way of ensuring payments are made. One in eight (12 per cent) said that a court-based arrangement had the advantage of being the fairest system. All other advantages were mentioned by five per cent or fewer of NRPs.

As only 14 NRPs said that a court-based arrangement was their overall preferred option, it is not possible to conduct analysis of perceived advantages as the numbers involved are too small.

7 Conclusions

As noted in the Introduction, while the survey asks respondents to predict their future choices, they are doing so on the basis of the limited knowledge that they had at the time of the survey, and without time to consider the options or discuss them with the other parent. The survey data should therefore be seen as indicative of clients' preferences, rather than as an accurate prediction of actual behaviour. Actual choices will be guided by the information clients receive in the future (from all sources), as well as their circumstances at the time they make a choice.

Survey responses may also have been influenced by clients' awareness of the options. For example, court-based arrangements may have been attractive to some respondents because they had heard of this approach. Similarly, for those wanting to use the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC), keeping the existing payment may have been seen as preferable because this was known and familiar to the respondent.

Overall, the survey shows a fairly high level of support for making own arrangements. This is higher for parents with care (PWCs) on benefit, a key group of interest, but is not confined to this group. Support for own arrangements was also higher than average among Maintenance Direct clients, PWCs in nil-assessed cases and non-resident parents (NRPs) with a lower than average financial assessment, those with more recent claim start dates and younger PWCs. Those with a friendly relationship with the other parent were also much more likely to consider making their own arrangements. These details may be useful in deciding where to focus information and guidance.

The survey provides an overview of clients' preferences, but more detailed information could usefully be obtained about the:

- concerns that clients have for making their own arrangements, and how these concerns could be addressed;
- perceived advantages and disadvantages of different options (the survey was only able to touch on this briefly).

This additional information would help to gain a more detailed understanding of clients' perceptions.

Appendix A

Sample selection

The Department for Work and Pensions selected an initial sample of 8,503 parents with care (PWCs) and 6,999 non-resident parents (NRPs) from the CS2 database (November 2006 version). This was a '1 in n' selection from all available records.

All of these cases then went through a telephone number search, in order to maximise the number that could be included in the survey. Those that still had no telephone number (either from look-up or original sample) were excluded.

The following number of cases were then selected:

Table A.1 Initial sample

	Number available (with telephone number)	Number selected	Target number of interviews
PWC, on benefit, MD	298	224	90
PWC, on benefit, not MD	2,791	1,058	425
PWC, not on benefit, MD	647	174	70
PWC, not on benefit, not MD	3,583	535	215
NRP, MD	662	517	120
NRP, not MD	4,071	1,637	380
Total	12,052	4,145	1,300

(MD = Maintenance Direct)

Within each of the six sample groups, the sample was stratified by the following variables prior to selection (in the order specified); a '1 in n' selection was then made:

Table A.2 Variables used to select samples

	PWC variable	NRP variable
Whether on benefit	n/a (PWC sample already split according to this)	ON_BEN
Whether maintenance direct case	CCMDFLG	CCMDFLG
Old/new	RULEIND	RULEIND
Disability	DISABILITY	DISABILITY

During fieldwork, a reserve sample was selected from the remaining available cases. These were selected in the same way as the main sample, with numbers selected as follows:

Table A.3 Revised final sample

	Number remaining after main sample selection	Number selected for reserve sample	Total number selected (main and reserve)
PWC, on benefit, MD	74	50	274
PWC, on benefit, not MD	1,733	250	1,308
PWC, not on benefit, MD	473	0	174
PWC, not on benefit, not MD	3,048	0	535
NRP, MD	145	0	517
NRP, not MD	2,434	0	1,637
Total	7,907	300	4,445

Appendix B

Questionnaire

CSA reform final main stage questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is < > calling on behalf of BMRB Social Research. We are conducting a survey on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions about child support. You should have received a letter about this recently.

All your responses will be treated in the strictest of confidence. IF NECESSARY: The interview should take around 15 minutes.

CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

ASK ALL

- Q1. Firstly, can I just check that you have a child or children from a previous relationship, and that this child/these children normally live with you rather than the other parent/the other parent rather than you [wording dependent on sample information on whether PWC/NRP]. Is this correct?
IF RESPONDENT HAS MORE THAN ONE CHILD FROM DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS (I.E. MULTIPLE CSA CASES), ASK RESPONDENT TO THINK ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUNGEST CHILD IN INTERVIEW [QCHECK]

Yes 1

- No, child/children lives with me/other parent (ie respondent disagrees with sample) 2
Respondent is back living with other parent (THANK AND CLOSE) 3

- ASK ALL PWCs
- Q2. Have you been on Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or Incapacity Benefit in the last three months or so? [QBEN]
MULTI-CODED
- Yes, Income Support 1
Yes, JSA 2
Yes, Incapacity Benefit 3
No 4
- IF YES [IF 1 OR 2 OR 3 AT QBEN]
- Q3. Are you currently on [Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance/Incapacity Benefit]? [QBENNOW]
- Yes 1
No 2
- ASK ALL PWCs
- Q4. I'd now like to ask about your arrangements for child support. How are you supposed to receive payments from the other parent - is it? READ OUT [QARRANGP]
- Given to you or your child(ren) directly 1
Paid through the Child Support Agency (CSA) 2
IF CURRENTLY ON IS/JSA/IB: Included in your benefit payment 3
(DO NOT READ OUT: Don't receive any payments) 4
Other (TYPE IN) 5
- IF DON'T RECEIVE ANY PAYMENTS AND NOT ON IS OR JSA OR IB NOW [IF NOT 1 AT QBENNOW AND IF 4 AT QARRANGP]
- Q5. So you currently have no arrangements for child support payment at all? [QNARRNOP]
- Don't have any arrangement 1
Yes, have arrangement (go back to Q4) 2
- IF NO ARRANGEMENTS [1 AT QARRNOP]
- Q6. Why do you not have any arrangements for payment at the moment? DO NOT PROMPT [QWHYNOP]
- Children no longer eligible (THANK AND CLOSE) 1
Agreed with other partner to stop payments 2
CSA said that other parent did not need to pay anything 3
CSA has not yet made an assessment 4
Have never had any arrangements 5
Other (TYPE IN) 6

ASK ALL NRPs

- Q7. Have you been on Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance or Incapacity Benefit in the last three months or so? [QBEN2]

MULTI-CODED

Yes, Income Support 1

Yes, JSA 2

Yes, Incapacity Benefit 3

No 4

IF YES [IF 1 OR 2 OR 3 AT QBEN2]

- Q8. Are you currently on [Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance/ Incapacity Benefit]? [QBEN2NW]

Yes 1

No 2

- Q9. I'd now like to ask about your arrangements for child support. How are you supposed to make payments to the other parent - is it?

[QARRANGN] READ OUT

To the other parent or the child(ren) directly 1

Through the Child Support Agency (CSA) 2

As a deduction from benefits 3

(DO NOT READ OUT: Don't need to make any payments) 4

Other (TYPE IN) 5

Don't know 6

IF DON'T MAKE ANY PAYMENTS [IF 4 AT QARRANGN]

- Q10. So you currently have no arrangements for child support payment at all? [QARRNON]

Don't have any arrangement 1

Yes, have arrangement (go back to Q9) 2

IF NO ARRANGEMENTS [IF 1 AT QARRNON]

- Q11. Why do you not have any arrangements for payment at the moment?

[QWHYNON] DO NOT PROMPT

Children no longer eligible (THANK AND CLOSE) 1

Agreed with other partner to stop payments 2

CSA said that I did not need to pay anything 3

CSA has not yet made an assessment 4

Have never had any arrangements 5

Other (TYPE IN) 6

ASK ALL PWCs AND NRPs WITH ARRANGEMENTS [IF 1-3 OR 5 AT QARRANGP OR QARRANGN]

Q12. Overall, how well do you think this payment arrangement works?
[QHOWWORK] READ OUT

Very well 1
Fairly well 2
Not very well 3
Not at all well 4

ASK IF NOT VERY WELL OR NOT AT ALL WELL [3 OR 4 AT QHOWWORK]
AND PWC

Q13. What problems have you had with this payment arrangement? DO NOT
PROMPT [QPROBSP]

Don't (always) receive (full) payment 1
Payments not (always) on time/delays 2
Amount calculated was not correct 3
Amount not fair/not enough 4
Problems/delays in receiving the assessment 5
Problems with CSA 6
Other (TYPE IN) 7

ASK IF NOT VERY WELL OR NOT AT ALL WELL [3 OR 4 AT QHOWWORK]
AND NRP

Q14. What problems have you had with this arrangement? DO NOT PROMPT
[QPROBSN]

Amount calculated was not correct 1
Amount not fair/too much 2
Problems/delays in receiving the assessment 3
Problems with CSA 4
Other (TYPE IN) 5

ASK ALL PWCs AND NRPs WITH ARRANGEMENTS [IF 1-3 OR 5 AT
QARRANGP OR QARRANGN]

Q15. How well do you feel you understand the way in which the CSA calculates
how much maintenance should be paid? [QUNDER] READ OUT

Very well 1
Fairly well 2
Not very well 3
or not at all well 4

PAST ARRANGEMENTS

ASK ALL

Q16. Before you or the other parent had contact with the CSA, did you have any other type of child support arrangement in place, even if you just had your own private agreement? [QPAST]

Yes 1

No 2

IF YES [1 AT QPAST]

Q17. What type of arrangement was this? PROMPT TO PRECODES [QTYPE]

Court order/arrangement 1

Made own arrangements/private agreement 2

Other (TYPE IN) 3

Q18. Overall, how well did this arrangement work? [QWELL] READ OUT

Very well 1

Fairly well 2

Not very well 3

Not at all well 4

ASK IF NOT VERY WELL OR NOT AT ALL WELL [3 OR 4 AT QWELL] AND PWC

Q19. What problems did you have? DO NOT PROMPT [QPROBP]

Disagreement with the other parent 1

Disagreements over how much maintenance had been paid 2

Didn't (always) receive (full) payment 3

Payments not (always) on time/delays 4

Amount not fair/not enough 5

Problems with solicitor/court process 6

Other (TYPE IN) 7

ASK IF NOT VERY WELL OR NOT AT ALL WELL [3 OR 4 AT QWELL] AND NRP

Q20. What problems did you have? DO NOT PROMPT [QPROBN]

Disagreement with the other parent 1

Amount not fair/too much 2

Problems with solicitor/court process 3

Other (TYPE IN) 4

ASK IF PREVIOUS ARRANGEMENT WORKED VERY OR FAIRLY WELL [1 OR 2 AT QWELL] AND PWC

Q21. Why did the arrangement change? DO NOT PROMPT [QCHANGEP]

- Disagreement with the other parent 1
- Didn't (always) receive (full) payment 2
- Payments not (always) on time/delays 3
- Amount not fair/not enough 4
- Had to use CSA because I started a benefit claim 5
- Preferred CSA/more formal arrangement through CSA 6
- Change in other parent's financial circumstances 7
- Other (TYPE IN) 8

ASK IF PREVIOUS ARRANGEMENT WORKED VERY OR FAIRLY WELL [1 OR 2 AT QWELL] AND NRP

Q22. Why did the arrangement change? DO NOT PROMPT [QCHANGEN]

- Disagreement with the other parent 1
- Amount not fair/too much 2
- Had to use CSA because the other parent started a benefit claim 3
- Preferred CSA/more formal arrangement through CSA 4
- Change in other parent's financial circumstances 5
- Other (TYPE IN) 6

NEW ARRANGEMENTS

ASK ALL

The Government will be changing the arrangements for child maintenance and you will have some options for what you want to do. I'd now like to ask you about these options.

Firstly, you could make your own arrangements, without the involvement of any organisations such as the CSA or the courts. It would be for you and the other parent to decide what arrangement you want. This could either be a maintenance payment which you would handle yourselves; or you could have an informal arrangement or no maintenance arrangement at all.

Q23. In principle, how likely would you be to consider making your own arrangements...? [QOWN] READ OUT

- Very likely 1
- Fairly likely 2
- Not very likely 3
- Not at all likely 4
- DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5
- Don't know 6

IF IT DEPENDS [5 AT QOWN] AND PWC

Q24. What would it depend on? DO NOT PROMPT [QOWNDEPP]

Whether could agree with the other parent 1

What (detailed) arrangement is 2

What amount was agreed 3

Whether could go back to using CSA/other system if it didn't work 4

Whether other parent would actually pay 5

What action I could take if the other parent didn't pay 6

Other (TYPE IN) 7

IF IT DEPENDS [5 AT QOWN] AND NRP

Q25. What would it depend on? DO NOT PROMPT [QOWNDEPN]

Whether could agree with the other parent 1

What (detailed) arrangement is 2

What amount was agreed 3

Whether could go back to using CSA/other system if it didn't work 4

Whether the other parent lets me see child(ren) 5

Other (TYPE IN) 6

ASK IF VERY OR FAIRLY LIKELY TO CONSIDER OWN ARRANGEMENTS

[QOWN 1 OR 2]

Q26. Do you think the other parent would be willing to consider this approach?

[QPART]

Yes – definitely 1

Possibly 2

No 3

Don't know 4

ASK ALL EXCEPT 'VERY LIKELY' TO CONSIDER OWN ARRANGEMENTS [2-6 AT QOWN]

Q27. If help was provided to make it easier for parents to make their own arrangements – for example, face-to-face advice or telephone help-lines – how likely would you be to consider making your own arrangements? Would you be...? [QOWNHELP] READ OUT

Very likely 1

Fairly likely 2

Not very likely 3

Not at all likely 4

(DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5

Don't know 6

IF VERY/FAIRLY LIKELY, BUT NOT VERY/FAIRLY LIKELY AT FIRST QUESTION
[1 OR 2 AT QOWNHELP AND 3-6 AT QOWN]

Q28. Do you think the other parent would be willing to consider this approach?
[QPART2]

Yes – definitely 1
Possibly 2
No 3
Don't know 4

IF VERY/FAIRLY LIKELY WITH HELP PROVIDED, OR IF MORE LIKELY WITH
HELP PROVIDED [IF 1 OR 2 AT QOWNHELP OR (3 AT QOWNHELP AND 4 AT
QOWN)]

Q29. Which of the following types of help would you be interested in? READ
OUT. MULTICODE [QTYPES]

A telephone help-line 1
Face-to-face meetings 2
A service to formally record private agreements and payments made 3
A service to calculate the amount of child maintenance 4
Mediation services to help parents reach an agreement 5
Other (TYPE IN) 6

ASK ALL EXCEPT 'NOT AT ALL LIKELY' TO CONSIDER OWN
ARRANGEMENTS [NOT 4 AT QOWNHELP]

Q30. If you did make your own arrangements, which of the following three
options do you think you would prefer? [QOWNPREF] READ OUT

Firstly, agree a regular maintenance payment 1
Secondly, have an informal arrangement, for example where you/the other
parent makes an occasional payment such as a household bill, or pays for
children's clothes 2
Or thirdly, have no maintenance arrangement at all 3
Don't know 4

NOT DON'T KNOW [NOT 4 AT QOWNPREF]

Q31. Why would you prefer this approach? [QWHYPREF] DO NOT PROMPT

Easier 1
Do not want any contact with the other parent 2
Want to minimise contact with the other parent 3
Can't afford to pay maintenance 4
Need regular payment 5
Best way to get some money/help 6
It's the arrangement I/we have now 7
Other (TYPE IN) 8

ASK ALL

Q32. The alternative to making your own arrangements will be to use a new organisation, in place of the CSA, called C-MEC. People using C-MEC will have two options:

- Option 1: **keep the maintenance payment exactly the same as now.** Both you **and** the other parent would need to agree on this option. No changes to the current payment would be permitted and if payments failed to be made C-MEC would not take any action.
- Option 2: **C-MEC would make a new calculation for the amount to be paid.** At this stage, we cannot work out what this amount would be, but, like now, it would take into account the number of children and <PWC: the other parent's / NRP: your> income. C-MEC will have legal powers to enforce maintenance payments.

In principle, how likely would you be to use C-MEC for either of these options - either to collect payments and/or to calculate a new amount?

[QCMEC] READ OUT

- Very likely 1
- Fairly likely 2
- Not very likely 3
- Not at all likely 4
- (DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5
- Don't know 6

IF IT DEPENDS [IF 5 AT QCMEC]

Q33. What would it depend on? [QDEP]

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

The new amount/payment (how much / whether it's more/less than the existing payment) 1

Information and guidance received 2

What enforcement measures there will be to ensure payments are made 3

How good/efficient new service/C-MEC is/whether C-MEC better than CSA 4

Preference of the other parent/what I can agree with the other parent 5

Other (specify) 6

Don't know 7

UNLESS NOT VERY LIKELY OR NOT AT ALL LIKELY [IF NOT 3 OR 4 AT QCMEC]

Q34. And if you did use C-MEC, which of the two options do you think you would prefer? [QCOPT]

READ OUT

- Keep the existing maintenance payment 1
- <NRP: Make/PWC: Receive> payment based on new calculation 2
- (DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 3
- Don't know 4

IF EXISTING PAYMENT [IF 1 AT QCOPT]

Q35. Do you think the other parent would be willing to consider this option (IF NECESSARY: that is, keeping the existing maintenance payment)? [QPART3]

Yes - definitely 1
 Yes - possibly 2
 No 3
 Don't know 4

ASK ALL

Q36. The other option for maintenance payments is through a **court order**. This would involve making an agreement through a solicitor which a court approves. This option involves legal costs unless you are eligible for legal aid.

Again, in principle, how likely would you be to consider this option? READ OUT [QCOURT]

Very likely 1
 Fairly likely 2
 Not very likely 3
 Not at all likely 4
 (DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5
 Don't know 6

IF BENEFIT PWC AND DON'T WANT AN ARRANGEMENT OR ONLY WANT AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT [PWC AND 1 AT QBENNOW AND (2 OR 3 AT QOWNPRE)]

Q37. Currently only parents with care on benefits who applied to the CSA after March 2003 are allowed to keep up to £10 per week of their child maintenance in addition to their benefits. However, the government is extending this scheme in the next two years to include everyone.

You said earlier that you preferred not to make an arrangement or would prefer to make an informal arrangement. How likely would you be to make a child maintenance arrangement of any type if you were allowed to keep up to **£20** a week of the child maintenance paid in addition to your benefits? [QKEEP]

Very likely 1
 Fairly likely 2
 Not very likely 3
 Not at all likely 4
 (DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5
 Don't know 6

IF NOT VERY LIKELY AT QKEEP – AND THEN AT EACH ITERATION OF QKEEP2
[IF NOT 1 AT QKEEP AND THEN NOT 1 AT QKEEP2]

Q38. And how likely would you be to make a child maintenance arrangement of any type if... [QKEEP2]

- this amount were to increase to **£40**?
- you could keep **all** the maintenance?

Very likely 1

Fairly likely 2

Not very likely 3

Not at all likely 4

(DO NOT READ OUT: It depends) 5

Don't know 6

ASK ALL

Q39. When you actually need to choose one of the options, do you think your decision will be affected by? [QOPDEC]

READ OUT [yes/no for each]

the information and guidance you receive 1

what enforcement measures there will be to ensure payments are made 2

which arrangement pays the largest or smallest amount 3

anything else (if yes, specify) 4

Q40. Overall, which option do you think you and the other parent will choose?

[QOVOP] READ OUT. CODE ONE ONLY

Making your own arrangements 1

Using C-MEC but keeping existing payment 3

Using C-MEC with new payment calculation 4

Payment through court order 5

Don't know 6

IF NOT DON'T KNOW [IF NOT 5 AT QOVOP]

Q41. And what do you think the advantages are of <ANSWER FROM QOVOP>?

[QADOP]

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

Easier 1

Prefer to continue with current arrangement 2

Best way of ensuring payments are made 3

Will get highest/lowest payment 4

Fairest system 5

Can avoid contact with the other parent 6

Can minimise contact with the other parent 7

Don't have to deal with CSA/C-MEC/Government 8

Other parent will agree to it 9

Quickest way of making/receiving payments 10

Other (specify) 11

Don't know 12

IF NOT C-MEC [IF 1 OR 4 AT QOVOP]

Q42. And why do you think you would not use C-MEC? [QNCMEC]

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

Prefer own arrangements 1

Prefer court order 2

Negative experience of CSA / don't think that C-MEC will be any better 3

Don't/wouldn't need it 4

Other parent wouldn't agree/want it 5

It will take longer to make/receive payments /

think C-MEC will be slow at processing payments 7

Other (specify) 8

Don't know 9

IF NOT OWN ARRANGEMENTS [IF 2 OR 3 OR 4 AT QOVOP]

Q43. And why do you think you would not make your own arrangements?

QNOARR]

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

Don't have/want any contact with the other parent 1

Want to minimise contact with the other parent 2

Other parent refuses to make payments 3

Can't trust/rely on the other parent to make payments 4

Better/more convenient to let organisation (CSA/C-MEC) arrange payments 5

Prefer court order 6

Other (specify) 7

Don't know 8

CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS

Q44. Thinking now about contact between you and the other parent. How often do you see the other parent? [QEXCON]

PROMPT TO PRE-CODES IF NECESSARY

At least once a day 1

At least once a week 2

At least once a fortnight 3

At least once a month 4

At least once a year 5

Less often than once a year 6

Never 7

Q45. How would you describe your relationship with the other parent nowadays. Is it? READ OUT [QRELAT]

Very friendly 1

Quite friendly 2

Not very friendly 3

Very unfriendly 4

Mixed – sometimes friendly, sometimes unfriendly 5

(DO NOT READ OUT: No contact with other parent) 6

Don't know 7

ASK ALL

Q46. And how easy do you and the other parent find it to negotiate about matters affecting your children? [QNEGOT] READ OUT

Very easy 1

Fairly easy 2

Fairly difficult 3

or very difficult 4

(DO NOT READ OUT: No contact with other parent) 5

DEMOGRAPHICS

Now I just need to ask you a few questions about yourself.

ASK ALL

Q47. CODE GENDER [QSEX]

Male 1

Female 2

Q48. Can I check: how old were you on your last birthday? [QAGE]

Q49.

ENTER AGE 1

Refused 2

IF REFUSED [IF 2 AT QAGE]

Q50. Can you please tell me in what age group you would place yourself?

[QAGE2]

PROMPT TO PRE-CODES

Under 20 1

20 to 24 2

25 to 34 3

35 to 44 4

45 to 54 5

55 to 64 6

65 and over 7

Refused 8

Q51. What is your current legal marital status? [QSTAT]

READ OUT

Married and living with husband/wife 1

Married but separated from husband/wife 2

Divorced 3

Single, never married 4

Widowed 5

(DO NOT READ OUT: In a civil partnership) 6

Other (specify) 7

Refused 8

Q52. When you were in a relationship with the other parent, what was your marital status? [QSTAT2]

READ OUT

- Married 1
- Co-habiting/living together 2
- Living apart 3
- No relationship 4
- Other (specify) 5
- Don't know 6

Q53. To which of the following groups do you consider you belong? [QETH]

READ OUT ...

- White 1
- Black 2
- Asian 3
- Mixed ethnic group 4
- Other (specify) 5
- Don't Know 6
- Refused 7

Q54. Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity? By long-standing I mean something that had troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time? [QILL]

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know 3

IF YES [IF 1 AT QILL]

Q55. What kind of illness or disability do you have? [QKIND]

DO NOT READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

- Any physical disability 1
- Long-term/chronic health condition 2
- Learning difficulty 3
- Mental health illness 4
- Other health problem or disability (specify) 5
- Don't know

ASK ALL

Q56. Finally, so that we can learn more about what parents think of the changes to the child maintenance system, we would like to link your answers to these questions to administrative records held by the Department for Work and Pensions. This is for research purposes only and the linked data will only be used by BMRB and the research team at the Department for Work and Pensions. This will in no way affect your current or future dealings with the CSA. Could we have your permission to link your answers to administrative data? [QDLINK]

- Yes 1
- No 2

THANK AND CLOSE

Appendix C

Advance letter

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

Reference: 45105962/<serial number>

Private & Confidential

<Name>

<Address>

<Postcode>

February 2007

Dear <contact name>

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would like to talk to parents about proposed changes to the child maintenance system which you may or may not be aware of.

Under any new system, parents will be encouraged to make their own private arrangements for child maintenance payments, if they are not already doing so from by the end of 2008. For those parents who are unable to make their own arrangements, a new organisation called the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC) will be introduced in place of the Child Support Agency (CSA). In the meantime, for current customers, the CSA remains open for business as usual.

We have commissioned BMRB Social Research, an independent research company, to carry out a confidential survey about these changes on our behalf.

Your name has been selected from DWP records. An interviewer working on behalf of BMRB will telephone you in the next couple of weeks to arrange a convenient time to talk to you. Everything you tell the interviewer will be in complete confidence – no personal views or information will be passed to anyone outside the research team at BMRB and the DWP. Additional information is on the back of this letter.

I hope that you will take part in this DWP survey. Your views are very important to us. However if you really do not want to take part, or have any questions about the survey, you can call BMRB on: 0800 051 0883.

Whatever you decide, this will not affect the way in which the Agency deals with you or the case with which you are involved.

Thank you very much for your help in this important survey.

Yours sincerely,



Jane McConkey

DWP

Further information about the study

? Who is carrying out the study?

The Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned BMRB to carry out this study. BMRB is a research organisation, specialising in surveys among the public. It is completely independent of government and political parties.

? How was I selected for the study?

Your name and address have been drawn at random from the Child Support Agency records. We use this when you contact the Agency about your case. The DWP has been authorised to access these records for the purposes of this study. Taking part in this study will not affect any benefits or tax credits you receive or may want to claim in the future and will not affect any other dealings you may have with a government department or agency.

? Why have I been contacted?

As explained above you have been selected from the Child Support Agency records as someone who has made a Child Maintenance application that is still showing as live on the system, or has been a subject of such an application. There are some circumstances where you may not be aware that the Child Support Agency still holds your details as a client:

- Maintenance Direct – The CSA has made an assessment on your claim, or the claim which you are subject of, and you have made payment arrangements that require no subsequent involvement from the CSA. However in this circumstance your case remains on the CSA records in case your circumstances change and, as a result, you decide to request further CSA involvement in your case.
- Zero Maintenance Assessment – Your claim, or the claim which you are subject of, has been calculated by the CSA and no maintenance is currently due. Your case remains open on CSA records in case your circumstances change with the result that you then become eligible to pay or receive maintenance.

Even if your case is included in one of the above categories DWP would still be interested in you taking part in the research.

? What is the study about?

The study will ask questions about your child support arrangements, any former arrangements you might have had, the types of information and guidance you might find useful and your preferences for the types of child maintenance arrangements available in the future.

? *How will the information I provide be used?*

The information you provide will be used to help the DWP understand parents' preferences for the different types of arrangements available in the future. The DWP will use this information to help it plan the provision of new services. Anything that you say to BMRB (as well as whether you take part in the study or not) will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Nobody else will be told that you are taking part in the study and you will not be identified in the report of the findings of the research. The results of the study will be published on the DWP website at www.dwp.gov.uk.

) *Contacts in BMRB*

You should contact BMRB if you would like to ask any questions or you are sure you do not want to part in the research. The telephone number is: 0800 051 0883

Appendix D

Response rates

Table D.1 Response rates – Parents with care

	N	Population in scope of study %	Population in scope of fieldwork %
Number selected	2,290		
Ineligible (not population of interest)			
Respondent back living with other parent	13		
Children no longer eligible	15		
Other invalid	<u>12</u>		
	40		
Cases not issued to interviewers (opt-outs)	35		
Invalid cases			
Respondent moved, untraceable	75		
Respondent not known	209		
Respondent died	1		
Invalid telephone number	<u>691</u>		
	976	43	
No contact after 10+ calls	291		
Refusals			
Personal refusal	108		
Proxy refusal	7		
Abandoned interview	<u>42</u>		
	157		
Other reasons for no interview			
Respondent away during fieldwork period	3		
Interviews	788		
Response rate		35	64

Table D.2 Response rates – Non-resident parents

	N	Population in scope of study %	Population in scope of fieldwork %
Number selected	2,154		
Ineligible (not population of interest)			
Respondent back living with other parent	16		
Children no longer eligible	35		
Other invalid	<u>16</u>		
	67		
Cases not issued to interviewers (opt-outs)	43		
Invalid cases			
Respondent moved, untraceable	127		
Respondent not known	163		
Respondent died	0		
Invalid telephone number	<u>534</u>		
	824	39	
No contact after 10+ calls	419		
Refusals			
Personal refusal	162		
Proxy refusal	18		
Abandoned interview	<u>51</u>		
	231		
Other reasons for no interview			
Respondent away during fieldwork period	24		
Interviews	546		
Response rate		26	45

Appendix E

Weighting

A two-stage weight was applied to reflect:

- the differential probability of selection for Maintenance Direct clients and parents with care (PWC) benefit clients;
- differential response weight – a weight was calculated for both PWC and non-resident parent (NRP) interviews. The characteristics compared were age of youngest qualifying child, case start date, whether on benefits, whether Maintenance Direct cases, disability and old or new case. For PWC interviews, the profiles matched on the disability and whether Maintenance Direct cases variables; a weight was therefore derived for the other variables. For NRP interviews, the same weight was applied, as well as a further weight based on disability.

