

The Child Support Agency (CSA)

Background

The CSA assesses, collects and pays child maintenance, ensuring that children are financially supported by both parents, even if they do not live together.

Do parents have to use the CSA?

No, parents can reach their own agreements. However, if they are receiving Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance, then they will be treated as applying for child maintenance and automatically be referred to the CSA.

Ways to pay child maintenance

Parents can pay money directly to the parent with care, or manually, for example by cheque. They can also pay by direct debit or standing order to the CSA, or their employer can deduct money straight from their earnings. If they receive a pension or other benefits the money will usually be taken direct from this source.

The CSA caseload

In June 2007 the CSA was dealing with 1.4 million cases.

Money and debt

- In the year to June 2007, £906million was collected or paid direct to the parent with care after parents asked us to work out the amount of child maintenance
- £294m was paid direct to parents with care after parents asked us to work out the amount of child maintenance
- Almost £612m (through other collection services) was collected. This is an increase of nearly £16m from the previous year (July 2005 to June 2006, when we collected £596m.)
- The average child maintenance assessment is now £22 per week
- In June 2007, maintenance was being paid to 659,900 children
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- In June 2007 40% of arrears were being collected, an increase on 33% in June 2006.

Enforcement

- The CSA has powers to recover outstanding debt, including court action, which can result in imprisonment, the suspension of driving licences and even the freezing of assets and the sale of goods and property. In the last year, 13,365 cases, or 37 cases a day, have been passed on to bailiffs
- In the last year, 13,000 cases, or 36 cases a day, have been passed on to the courts
- Every month, around 6,000 employers are instructed to take money direct from wages
- In England and Wales in the last year, 12,490 liability orders and 1,995 third party debt orders were granted

Other useful statistics

- At May 2007, the CSA employed 11,000 people, down from 11,200 a year ago.

- The CSA receives around 5m phone calls a year. The average waiting times have improved: for new scheme calls it was 24 seconds by June 2007, a improvement on the 31 seconds in 2006/7
- The average parent with care is 37 years old and the average non-resident parent is 39
- 7% of non-resident parents are self-employed, 45% are employed and 48% are unemployed