

# Annex III – Stakeholder consultation

## Summary

1. This section details the consultation process carried out as an integral part of the redesign. It also provides a brief summary of the main themes emerging from comments received and presented to me.
2. Following the Secretary of State's announcement that I would undertake a redesign of child support, the Redesign team and I have met with a wide range of people. I am extremely grateful to all of those who took the time to contribute their views.
3. It was vital that as many people as possible could contribute to this important work. Online consultation pages were made available on the Department for Work and Pensions website and these resulted in a large number of e-mails. Letters and more detailed submissions were received from the public, external interest groups, MPs and Peers.
4. A range of relevant external interest groups and all MPs and Peers were contacted at the beginning of the consultation period. They were invited to provide their views and comments on the future of child support.
5. The Redesign team also had very useful visits to CSA offices and received feedback from Agency staff.

## External interest groups

6. I met with or received written input from key external interest groups, including:
  - Child Poverty Action Group
  - Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS)
  - Citizens Advice
  - Families Need Fathers
  - Family Justice Council

- Fathers Direct
- Moneywatchers
- One Parent Families
- Resolution
- Scoop Aid
- The Law Society
- The National Association for Child Support Action (NACSA)

## Public consultation

7. Direct postal and e-mail addresses, along with specific web pages on the Department for Work and Pensions' website, were set up to ensure that the public could make a contribution. The website included questions linked to the terms of reference:
  - What support and advice would help parents whose relationship has broken down to agree the best and fairest way of supporting their children?
  - Can we find a better way of ensuring children get maintenance payments?
  - What is the right balance between enforcing responsibilities, getting more money to children and value for the taxpayer?
  - What other objectives should be served through a child support system and how?
8. I received a good response to the consultation, including 110 e-mails to the redesign inbox and 147 letters from the public. I would like to thank all of those who contributed their views.

## Summary of main themes emerging

Responses inevitably varied, with views often reflecting individual circumstances. However, some key themes emerged and these are listed below.

- The most widely held view was that **family mediation and advice services** are needed to provide parents with information on the options available to them. It was suggested that factual advice is needed on all issues, including child support, financial arrangements, housing and employment.
- **Removing benefit compulsion** to allow parents to pursue maintenance independently of the CSA was another common view. Along with this, many were keen for parents with care to keep more, or all, of any maintenance received in addition to benefits.
- **Allowing parents to apply for maintenance through the courts**, in particular those who are already going to court to organise other financial matters, was a popular view. This was despite some concerns that delays can occur in dealing with changes of circumstances and non-compliant non-resident parents.
- **Advanced payment of maintenance** was a popular idea. Introducing a flat rate of maintenance, designed to reflect the basic needs of a child, was also suggested.
- A common concern was that **maintenance paid to the parent with care might not always benefit the child**.
- Many expressed concern regarding the **impact that paying child support has on new relationships and second families**, and the **shared care arrangements** parents have. Opinions differed between unfairness caused to second families, who may be suffering because of child support, and unfairness caused to the first family, who may be suffering because of the allowance given for the second family in the maintenance calculation. Some respondents also thought it unfair that shared care rules affect the amount of maintenance payable. However, it was recognised by many that there is **no easy solution that would suit all families**.
- A widespread request was for **old scheme cases to convert to the new scheme rules**. Some respondents commented that at the very least, **parents with care on the old scheme should benefit from the new scheme Child Maintenance Premium**.

### Summary of main themes emerging *(continued)*

- There was broad agreement that **a fairer and tougher approach to enforcement** was needed, with many recognising that the CSA already has ample enforcement powers. A few suggested **removing the non-resident parent's passport or charging penalties for non-payment**. In addition, many asked for **Deduction from Earnings Orders to be issued as early as possible**.
- Many agreed that the CSA needs **better information-sharing with other government departments**, and a few commented that the child support function would be much better located in HM Revenue & Customs. In addition, some favoured using **HM Revenue & Customs to deduct payments** through non-resident parents' tax codes.