

The Auditor-General  
Audit Report No.46 2009–10  
Performance Audit

# **Child Support Reforms: Building a Better Child Support Agency**

**Department of Human Services**

Australian National Audit Office

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of Australia 2010

ISSN 1036-7632

ISBN 0 642 81140 7

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Canberra ACT  
22 June 2010

Dear Mr President  
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit in the Department of Human Services in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present the report of this audit and the accompanying brochure. The report is titled *Child Support Reforms: Building a Better Child Support Agency*.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McPhee', is positioned above the printed name.

Ian McPhee  
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate  
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT

## AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

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# Abbreviations

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ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
BBCSA	Building a Better Child Support Agency
CHAS	Customers Having a Say
COA	Change of assessment
CSA	Child Support Agency
CSO	Customer Service Officer
CSSR	Child Support Scheme Reforms
DHS	Department of Human Services
EDAA	External Delivery Assurance Advisor
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
NEC	National Executive Change
PMF	Performance Management Framework
RSC	Regional Service Centre
SSAT	Social Security Appeals Tribunal
TSO	Technical Support Officer

# Glossary

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Change of assessment	A CSA administrative process that a customer or CSA can initiate if they believe a child support assessment does not reflect the parents' or childrens' special circumstances.
Child Support Reforms	The suite of measures announced in February 2006 aimed at improving the Child Support Scheme and its administration. The Child Support Reforms include the Improving Compliance program, Child Support Scheme Reforms and Building a Better CSA program.
Child Support Scheme Reforms	Policy changes introduced during 2006–08 that aimed to ensure that the Child Support Scheme adequately addressed the needs and costs of supporting children in separated families and promoted shared parental responsibility.
CSAonline	A secure online service that enables customers and employers to view and update some information held by CSA, and send and receive messages to and from CSA.
External Delivery Assurance Advisor	An external contractor engaged by CSA to monitor the implementation of the Child Support Reforms and report the results to the National Executive Change at CSA.
Improving Compliance Program	An initiative aimed at improving the accuracy of child support assessments, increasing the amount of child support collected and transferred between parents, and minimising the risk of non-compliance during the implementation of the Child Support Scheme Reforms.
Regional Service Centres	Small CSA offices co-located with other Human Services portfolio agencies' offices that customers can visit to discuss their child support case with a Customer Service Officer.



Stakeholders	Advocacy and customer representative groups, legal practitioner groups, service providers and peak bodies, family research institutes, review bodies and government agencies with an interest or role in child support.
Technical Support Officer	CSA staff members who provide advice and support the development of the technical child support knowledge of Customer Service Officers.



# **Summary and Recommendations**



# Summary

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## Introduction

1. Commencing in 1988, the Child Support Scheme was designed to address concerns about the poverty of women and children following separation and divorce; and the increasing government expenditure required to support children where parents were not meeting their financial obligations.<sup>1</sup> The Child Support Scheme provides an administrative avenue to determine and enforce the transfer of child support between separated parents, without the involvement of courts.
2. The Child Support Agency (CSA) was formed in 1988 as part of the Australian Taxation Office to administer the Child Support Scheme.<sup>2</sup> In 1998, CSA was transferred to the Department of Family and Community Services<sup>3</sup> before becoming part of the newly formed Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2004. While established as part of DHS, CSA largely operated as a separate agency until July 2008, when a departmental reorganisation brought the enabling functions (such as information technology, human resources, finance and legal) of CSA within the department.
3. CSA's functions and operations are legislatively based.<sup>4</sup> Its role includes the registration of separated parents and their children; the assessment of child support liabilities; and the collection, enforcement and transfer of child support payments. CSA also manages customer complaints and objections, and reviews assessments when requested by customers through the change of assessment process. CSA has over 1.5 million customers and, in 2008–09, assisted in the transfer of approximately \$2.8 billion in child support payments.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, *In the Best Interests of Children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2005, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1 shows the major developments in the Child Support Scheme since its introduction and CSA's establishment in 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Now known as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, which is the reference used throughout this report.

<sup>4</sup> *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988* and the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*. The Deputy Secretary, Child Support Program, is the Child Support Registrar for the purposes of the Acts.

## Child Support Reforms

4. In February 2006, the then Australian Government announced the Child Support Reforms program as part of its response to the 2005 report of the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, *In the Best Interests of Children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme*. The Taskforce made 30 recommendations covering all aspects of the Child Support Scheme including changes to the child support formula, the broader Child Support Scheme and CSA’s role and resources.

5. The Child Support Reforms comprised three key initiatives aimed at addressing growing concerns in the community about the adequacy of the Child Support Scheme and its administration, namely the:

- Child Support Scheme Reforms (CSSR) — \$582.2 million<sup>5</sup>;
- Improving Compliance program — \$165.1 million<sup>6</sup>; and
- Building a Better CSA (BBCSA) program — \$146.6 million.

### Building a Better CSA

6. The BBCSA program was funded for five years, from 2005–06, to assist CSA to manage the complex work of implementing the Child Support Scheme Reforms, negative public perceptions of CSA’s administration of the Child Support Scheme, and shortcomings in CSA’s culture, structure and capability.<sup>7</sup>

7. The BBCSA program comprised 15 projects which were collectively aimed at achieving three objectives, namely:

- Develop a customer-focused approach to service delivery, characterised by more accessible, consistent, responsive, professional, accountable and empathetic interactions with customers (‘customer service improvements’, \$106 million);

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<sup>5</sup> The Child Support Scheme Reforms (CSSR) were policy changes that aimed to ensure that the Child Support Scheme adequately addressed the needs and costs of supporting children and promoted shared parental responsibility. Given the number and complexity of the changes involved, the CSSR were introduced in a phased manner over three years commencing with stage one on 1 July 2006, stage two on 1 July 2007 and concluding with stage three on 1 July 2008.

<sup>6</sup> The Australian National Audit Office has previously conducted an audit, *Child Support Reforms: Stage One of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance* (Audit Report No.19 2009–10).

<sup>7</sup> Child Support Agency, *Strategic Review*, 2005.

- Develop a customer-focused organisational culture that eliminates bias and community perceptions of the need for greater procedural fairness in customer outcomes ('organisational change and improved customer service skills'<sup>8</sup>, \$23 million); and
- Increase proactive engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system ('improved communication and stakeholder engagement', \$22 million).<sup>9</sup>

8. Table S 1 shows how CSA grouped the 15 BBCSA projects into four programs to support the achievement of the three objectives.

**Table S 1**

**BBCSA objectives, programs and projects**

Objective	Program	Project
Customer service improvements	New Service Delivery Model	Team Size and Support Restructure
		Regional Service Centres
		Personalised Services
		Change of Assessment Reforms
	Channel	Increased Online Services
		Call Recording
		IT Systems Architecture
Organisational change and improved customer service skills	Organisational Change	Customer First
		Levers of Change
		Procedural Fairness
		Performance Management Framework
Improved communication and stakeholder engagement	External Relations	Education and Communication
		Conference Participation
		CSA Products
		Letters and Forms

Source: ANAO analysis of Child Support Agency, *BBCSA Outcomes Report*, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> In the report, this program is referred to as the 'Organisational Change program'.

<sup>9</sup> Funding totals \$151 million, not \$146.6 million, due to anticipated savings from the program. Source: Child Support Agency, *Building a Better CSA Reforms Package* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2008, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/media/building-a-better-csa.aspx>> [accessed 15 June 2009].

## Audit objective and criteria

9. The objective of the audit was to assess CSA's effectiveness in managing the implementation of the BBCSA program.

10. In conducting the audit, the ANAO examined the BBCSA key performance indicators to determine the degree to which the three identified BBCSA program objectives had been achieved and, in that context, how CSA's planning, implementation and performance monitoring and evaluation activities had been undertaken.

## Overall conclusion

11. The BBCSA program was established to assist CSA implement the Child Support Reforms and address identified shortcomings in its operations and culture. The BBCSA program was expected to develop an organisational culture that was more customer-focused, and improve CSA's engagement with customers and stakeholders. To this end, CSA identified three objectives to measure the success of the BBCSA program. Based on an analysis of the performance indicators in CSA's evaluation framework, greatest progress has been made in improving communication with customers and stakeholders; with limited progress being made in the two remaining areas, customer service and broader organisational change.

12. Feedback from customers and stakeholders, gathered by CSA, shows an increase in general satisfaction levels with communication and, particularly, a greater level of awareness and knowledge of CSA, its role in relation to the Child Support Scheme and the services it provides. CSA made progress in some areas of the remaining two objectives during the rollout of the BBCSA program (such as customers' satisfaction with CSA services and customers' perceptions of CSA's fairness in dealing with customers). However, in many cases where performance indicators and information was available, the momentum has not been sustained. As a consequence, the overall improvement has been limited. These results were, in part, a reflection on the limited effectiveness of some areas of CSA's implementation of the program, particularly the planning and monitoring and review aspects.

13. Commencing in 2005–06, and expected to run for five years, the BBCSA program formed part of the broader \$877 million Child Support Reforms. As the most significant change to the Scheme since its inception, the Child Support Reforms affected each of CSA's approximately 1.5 million customers and 3500 staff.



14. The BBCSA program was a key component of the Child Support Reforms that was designed to complement the policy and operational changes of the CSSR and the Improving Compliance program. Through providing a focus on delivering high-quality customer service, the BBCSA program was intended to be the central element to operationally and strategically position CSA to implement the reform agenda.

15. The BBCSA program was also an important part of addressing the acknowledged perceptions of customers, their representatives and stakeholders, that CSA's approach was 'insensitive, inconsistent and unaccountable'.<sup>10</sup> This included better educating customers and stakeholders on CSA's role given their views can be influenced by factors such as child support policy, which are outside of CSA's control or responsibility.

16. CSA faced challenges in planning and implementing the BBCSA program, particularly its relative inexperience in implementing an organisational change program, and having to introduce the changes in conjunction with the CSSR and the Improving Compliance program—which resulted in the initiatives becoming competing organisational priorities. Such an environment emphasised the importance of having in place, from the outset, a strong project management framework to support the achievement of the objectives.

17. Underpinning the BBCSA program and its three objectives were 15 projects. Limitations with the implementation of the BBCSA program and some of the projects impacted on CSA's capacity to achieve its objectives, particularly those of improved customer service and a changed organisational culture. These limitations included inadequate planning and project management arrangements (including risk management), undefined project scopes, incomplete project activities and insufficient ongoing monitoring and evaluation that could be used to identify and rectify issues.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

18. In positioning an organisation to achieve planned outcomes, CSA's implementation of the BBCSA program demonstrates the importance of:

- developing defined project scopes that reflect intended objectives;
- reviewing an organisation's existing and future operational environment to determine achievable objectives;
- articulating the future vision and communicating it to the organisation in a way that engages staff and instils a commitment at all levels; and
- prioritising program initiatives (including resourcing and scheduling) and establishing appropriate performance measures that are monitored on an ongoing basis, and provide the basis for review and remedial action.

19. Improvements in performance indicators, such as customer satisfaction, demonstrated during implementation of the BBCSA program have not been sustained in many cases. To assist CSA to build on the work undertaken as part of the BBCSA program and improve its customer service offering, the ANAO has made six recommendations aimed at improving the outcomes delivered by some of the BBCSA projects that continue to operate (such as Regional Service Centres); and enhancing CSA's ability to monitor the ongoing impact of the BBCSA program.

## Key findings by chapter

### Planning and implementation

20. The challenges presented by introducing the BBCSA program, which was critical to the success of the overall delivery of the Child Support Reforms, meant that adequate planning and project management arrangements were paramount. Due to a number of factors including limited program implementation experience, CSA did not adequately plan the implementation of the BBCSA program. This resulted in CSA's project management framework and supporting functions for the implementation of the BBCSA program not being fully agreed and introduced until 10 to 12 months after the commencement of the program.

21. These circumstances directly affected the BBCSA program and CSA's ability to meet the objectives, as project:

- budgets were reduced to fund the project management framework and supporting functions as associated costs had not been sought from government; and
- teams were not adequately supported to plan and manage their projects.

22. CSA monitored the implementation of the BBCSA program through the development of an evaluation framework, progress reporting, reviews and the use of an External Delivery Assurance Advisor. These arrangements, however, were limited in some areas including:

- the framework was not developed until nine months after the program commenced;
- CSA did not have a system to monitor projects' progress against milestones for the first 12 months of the program;
- the attention of CSA's Executive was repeatedly diverted to managing organisational issues, such as workforce affordability and accommodation constraints; and
- measures were not identified or developed for all performance indicators.

23. Given the BBCSA program was aimed at achieving organisational change, CSA would benefit from introducing relevant BBCSA performance indicators to its performance management framework so that the permanent impact of the changes can be assessed and further enhancements can be identified and implemented where required.

## **Customer service**

24. The first of the three objectives of the BBCSA program was to improve customer service by developing a customer-focused approach to service delivery. During the implementation of the program some customer service performance indicators showed an improvement, such as overall customer dissatisfaction which decreased from 22 per cent to 11 per cent in 2006–07. The levels of improvements made, however, have largely not been sustained.

25. Underpinning the customer service objective, CSA introduced seven projects, including Regional Service Centres and Personalised Services, aimed at improving its interaction with customers. There were shortcomings, however, in the implementation of some of the projects that impacted on CSA's ability to achieve its objective of improved customer service. In particular:

- some project activities did not sufficiently align with achieving the target outcomes or were not completed; and
- there has been insufficient monitoring of project impacts and a lack of further action to achieve outcomes.

26. Customers' views on service delivery can be influenced by a number of factors, some of which are outside CSA's responsibility (such as child support policy). CSA could regain the progress made towards improving its customer service by taking actions to fulfil the original outcomes of the customer service improvement projects; for example, by expanding its call recording capability and use of recorded calls, and improving Customer Service Officers' access to consistent and accurate technical advice. CSA could also improve customer satisfaction through the better use of information garnered through its operations to identify and address common underlying causes of customer dissatisfaction.

## **Organisational change**

27. The second objective of the BBCSA program was to develop a customer-focused organisational culture that eliminated bias and addressed community perceptions of the need for greater procedural fairness in customer outcomes. Projects introduced to achieve CSA's organisational change were successful at identifying areas that CSA needed to address in order to make progress towards its objective, however, competing organisational priorities and the limited lifespan of projects restricted the scope of activities implemented. Further, the effectiveness of project initiatives was compromised by factors including a lack of support from CSA National Office and Executive and, in some areas, limited staff capacity to implement follow-up actions.

28. Similar to customer service, some organisational change performance indicators, such as customer satisfaction with the consistency of advice provided by Customer Service Officers and customers' perceptions of CSA's fairness in handling their child support matter, showed an improvement during implementation of the BBCSA program. CSA did not, however,

adequately address the causes of customer, staff and stakeholder dissatisfaction and, as a result, many of these indicators have declined in 2009.

29. To foster an environment that allows permanent organisational change, it is important that CSA addresses critical areas such as adequate consideration of process and procedure re-design and leadership support, as part of any change program.

## **Communication and stakeholder engagement**

30. The final objective of the BBCSA program was aimed at increasing CSA's engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system.

31. CSA has improved its communication and stakeholder engagement since the BBCSA program commenced. Customers and stakeholders are now more satisfied with CSA's communication and engagement efforts and are more aware and knowledgeable of CSA, its role relative to the Child Support Scheme and the services that it provides. This is reflected by the communication and stakeholder engagement performance indicators; including, CSA survey results showing customer agreement with the statement 'CSA is now communicating better with parents, the community and organisations', increasing significantly between May 2007 and August 2008 (42 per cent to 74 per cent for receiving parents, and 43 per cent to 64 per cent for paying parents). It is unclear and difficult to measure, however, whether customer satisfaction with communication has resulted in increased voluntary compliance with child support obligations, as intended by the communication and stakeholder engagement program.

32. To build on the positive results in this area, there are further improvements CSA can make to its communication and engagement with customers and stakeholders including addressing issues associated with its letters and forms.

## Summary of agency response

### Department of Human Services

The Department welcomes the audit and agrees with its recommendations. The audit report provides a valuable assessment and framework to support further improvement to the operations and culture of the Child Support Agency (CSA).

In support of changes implemented through Building a Better Child Support Agency (BBCSA) the CSA has undertaken reforms that will further improve its ability to administer the child support scheme and address the recommendations made within the audit report. In September 2009, the then Secretary of the Department commissioned an independent review into the appropriateness, design and implementation of current decision making processes and quality assurance arrangements for the CSA. David Richmond AO was commissioned to conduct the review and the subsequent 'Delivering Quality Outcomes' report made a range of recommendations, which are currently being implemented.

The announcement by the Minister in December 2009 of the Government's intention to fundamentally reform the way services are delivered by Government to the Australian community, will also drive further changes in the operations of CSA as part of the Department and the wider portfolio.

The audit report acknowledges the challenges CSA faced in implementing the BBCSA program. These included CSA's relative inexperience in implementing a change program of such a large scale and the requirement for the work to be completed within a compressed timeframe and at the same time as complex work associated with changes to the Child Support Scheme. The Department notes the audit report's comments on improvements required in CSA practices including risk and project management and recognises the value of the improvements recommended to ensure effective and efficient best practice.

# Recommendations

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## Recommendation No.1

### Para 2.30

To assess the effectiveness of the BBCSA program in delivering permanent changes and identify opportunities for further improvement, the ANAO recommends that CSA review, develop and continue to monitor the relevant key performance indicators identified in the BBCSA evaluation framework.

**DHS response:** Agreed.

## Recommendation No.2

### Para 3.9

To improve CSA's capacity to respond to customers, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- align the training available to team leaders and technical support officers with their roles and responsibilities; and
- enhance the consistency and accuracy of technical advice available to customer service officers.

**DHS response:** Agreed.

## Recommendation No.3

### Para 3.17

To assist Regional Service Centres (RSCs) meet their objective of increasing customer access to services, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- assess whether the expected outcomes of RSCs align with the resources available;
- improve its planning and targeting of RSC outreach activities; and
- investigate opportunities to streamline administrative processes for RSCs.

**DHS response:** Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No.4**

**Para 3.25**

The ANAO recommends that, in order to assist in improving overall customer service, CSA use the information gathered through personalised services to identify and address systemic issues experienced by customers when interacting with CSA.

**DHS response:** Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No.5**

**Para 3.40**

Consistent with the objective of the call recording project in contributing to customer service improvement, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- investigate its capacity to, and where practicable, record all appropriate inbound and outbound customer calls to increase the accountability and transparency of interactions between CSA and customers; and
- use call recordings as a staff development tool, particularly by activating the call retrieval functionality for team leaders and technical support officers.

**DHS response:** Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No.6**

**Para 5.17**

To improve CSA's engagement with customers through letters and forms, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- analyse form completion patterns and address customer dissatisfaction with communication products, particularly the clarity of customer letters; and
- continue to examine options to reduce letter volumes including where multiple letters are sent to customers.

**DHS response:** Agreed.



## **Audit Findings and Conclusions**



# 1. Introduction

---

*This chapter provides background on the Child Support Agency, the Child Support Scheme and the Child Support Reforms, including the Building a Better CSA program. It also outlines the audit approach.*

## Child Support Agency

**1.1** In 1988, the Child Support Agency (CSA) was established as part of the Australian Taxation Office to administer the Child Support Scheme and to support separated parents to transfer child support payments. CSA's functions and operations derive from the *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988* and the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989* (the Acts).

**1.2** In 1998, CSA was transferred to the then Department of Family and Community Services<sup>11</sup> before becoming part of the newly formed Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2004.<sup>12</sup> DHS was created to 'improve the development and delivery of government social and health-related services to the Australian people'.<sup>13</sup>

**1.3** Despite nominally being a section of DHS since 2004, CSA remained relatively independent until mid-2008 when its corporate functions were combined with DHS. CSA is now known within the Australian Government as the Child Support Program of DHS but retains its CSA branding externally. CSA is led by the Deputy Secretary, Child Support Program, who is also the Child Support Registrar for the purposes of the Acts.

**1.4** CSA's role includes the registration of separated parents and their children, the assessment of child support liabilities; and the collection, enforcement and transfer of child support payments. CSA also manages customer complaints and objections, and reviews assessments when requested by customers through the change of assessment process. CSA has over 1.5 million customers and, in 2008–09, assisted in the transfer of approximately \$2.8 billion in child support payments.

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<sup>11</sup> Now known as the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), which is the reference used throughout this report.

<sup>12</sup> While CSA has responsibility for the day-to-day delivery of the Child Support Scheme, FaHCSIA has maintained portfolio responsibility for child support policy development since 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2008–09*, Canberra, 2009, p. 11.

## Child Support Scheme

**1.5** The Child Support Scheme was developed in the late 1980s to address concerns about the poverty of women and children following separation and divorce; and the increasing level of government expenditure to support children where parents were not meeting their financial obligations. The Child Support Scheme was designed to provide an administrative avenue to parents, outside of court involvement, as a means to determine and enforce the transfer of child support.

**1.6** The Child Support Scheme provides for CSA to determine child support assessments and provides CSA with various compliance tools to enforce the collection of child support. These enforcement powers include the capacity to issue a Departure Prohibition Order (DPO), litigate non-compliant parents with an identified means of payment and intercept tax refunds.

**1.7** In determining the amount of child support payable, CSA uses a formula that takes into account the income and level of care of both parents and the cost of raising children. For child support periods commencing on or after 1 January 2010, the minimum amount of annual child support the paying parent is required to pay is \$360 per annum. This amount is increased annually in line with the Consumer Price Index.

**1.8** There are two main types of customer groups in the Child Support Scheme; parents with CSA collect arrangements (46.8 per cent of cases) and parents with private collect arrangements (53.2 per cent of cases).<sup>14</sup> For CSA collect customers, CSA determines, collects and transfers the child support payable. Alternatively, private collect customers are registered with CSA but transfer payments between themselves without the involvement of CSA. The amount of child support paid in private collect arrangements is based on either a court order, CSA assessment or an agreement that has been accepted by CSA.

## Child Support Reforms

**1.9** In 2003, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs undertook an inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation and released a report which included a recommendation to examine the child support formula. The Australian

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Human Services, *Facts and Figures 2008–09*, DHS, Canberra, 2009, p. 5.

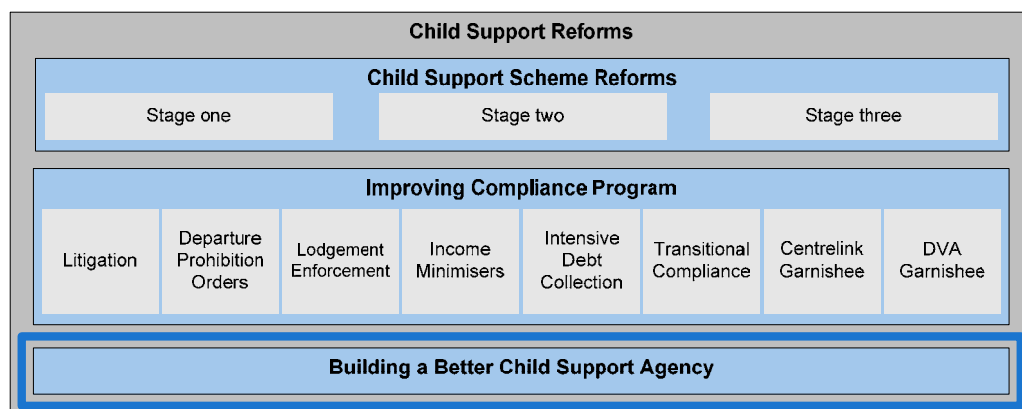
Government accepted this recommendation and established an independent Ministerial Taskforce to undertake the review.

**1.10** In June 2005, the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support released its report, *In the Best Interests of Children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme*. The report made 30 recommendations covering all aspects of the Child Support Scheme including changes to the child support formula, the broader Child Support Scheme and CSA's role and resources.

**1.11** In response to the report, the Government provided \$877 million over five years to implement a suite of measures known as the Child Support Reforms, which were aimed at improving the Child Support Scheme. The suite of measures comprised three key initiatives, which are shown in Figure 1.1. The component reviewed as part of this audit, the Building a Better CSA (BBCSA) program, is outlined.

**Figure 1.1**

### The Child Support Reforms



Source: ANAO analysis.

### Building a Better Child Support Agency program

**1.12** CSA received \$146.6 million over five years from 2005–06 for the BBCSA program.<sup>15</sup> The significant funding for the program recognised the complex work associated with implementing the Child Support Scheme

<sup>15</sup> Australian Government, op cit.

Reforms<sup>16</sup>, negative public perceptions of CSA's administration of the Child Support Scheme and shortcomings in CSA's culture, structure and capability.<sup>17</sup>

**1.13** The BBCSA program has three objectives:

- Develop a customer-focused approach to service delivery, characterised by more accessible, consistent, responsive, professional, accountable and empathetic interactions with customers ('customer service improvements', \$106 million).
- Develop a customer-focused organisational culture that eliminates bias and community perceptions of the need for greater procedural fairness in customer outcomes ('organisational change and improved customer service skills', \$23 million).
- Increase proactive engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system ('improved communication and stakeholder engagement', \$22 million).<sup>18</sup>

**1.14** Table 1.1 shows how CSA grouped the BBCSA projects into four programs to support the achievement of the three objectives.

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<sup>16</sup> The Child Support Scheme Reforms (CSSR) were policy changes that aimed to ensure that the Child Support Scheme adequately addressed the needs and costs of supporting children and promoted shared parental responsibility. Given the number and complexity of the changes involved, the CSSR were introduced in a phased manner over three years commencing with stage one on 1 July 2006, stage two on 1 July 2007 and concluding with stage three on 1 July 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Child Support Agency, *Strategic Review*, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Figures do not add to \$146.6 million due to anticipated savings from the BBCSA program. Child Support Agency, *Building a Better CSA Reforms Package* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2008, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/media/building-a-better-csa.aspx>> [accessed 15 June 2009].

**Table 1.1****BBCSA objectives, programs and projects**

Objective	Program	Project
Customer service improvements	New Service Delivery Model	Team Size and Support Restructure
		Regional Service Centres
		Personalised Services
		Change of Assessment Reforms
	Channel	Increased Online Services
		Call Recording
		IT Systems Architecture
Organisational change and improved customer service skills	Organisational Change	Customer First
		Levers of Change
		Procedural Fairness
		Performance Management Framework
Improved communication and stakeholder engagement	External Relations	Education and Communication
		Conference Participation
		CSA Products
		Letters and Forms

Source: ANAO analysis of Child Support Agency, *BBCSA Source: Outcomes Report*, 2008.

### 1.15 CSA expected the key impacts of the BBCSA program to be:

- a more responsive and visible CSA;
- improved access to CSA and other related services;
- better access for high need customers in regional areas;
- improved CSA accountability for decisions; and
- better informed customers and community.<sup>19</sup>

**1.16** The BBCSA program commenced in July 2006. The majority of the project activities were implemented during 2006 and 2007. From December 2007, CSA transferred responsibility for the BBCSA program activities from project teams to business-as-usual operations. CSA reported to

<sup>19</sup> Child Support Agency, *Building a Better CSA Reform Package: overview fact sheet* [Internet], CSA, Australia, undated, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/fact/index.aspx>> [accessed 7 October 2008].

the Cabinet Implementation Unit that all BBCSA program objectives were successfully completed by June 2008.

## Related ANAO audits

**1.17** In December 2009, the ANAO tabled *Child Support Reforms: Stage One of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance* (Audit Report No.19 2009–10). The audit assessed the effectiveness of the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of stage one of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and the Improving Compliance program. It also examined if the intended outcomes of these changes were achieved. The report made six recommendations.

**1.18** In November 2007, the ANAO tabled *Data Integrity in the Child Support Agency* (Audit Report No.16 2007–08), which made five recommendations. In 2005–06, the ANAO tabled the cross-portfolio *Forms for Individual Service Delivery* (Audit Report No.26 2005–06), which included CSA.

## The objective and approach

**1.19** The objective of the audit was to assess CSA's effectiveness in managing the implementation of the BBCSA program.

### Audit criteria

**1.20** The criteria for the audit were:

- CSA effectively planned the implementation of the BBCSA program;
- CSA effectively monitors and evaluates the ongoing impact of the BBCSA program, and uses this information to make adjustments and inform future decision-making; and
- the targets and objectives of the BBCSA program were achieved.

### Audit approach

**1.21** The audit was conducted in accordance with the ANAO's Auditing Standards and involved:

- examining files and records kept by DHS (including CSA) and FaHCSIA;
- interviewing staff from DHS (including CSA);
- extraction and analysis of data from CSA's databases; and



- seeking the views of relevant stakeholders, including non-government organisations.

**1.22** This audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO Auditing Standards at a cost of approximately \$367 748.

## Chapter structure

**1.23** The areas examined as part of this audit are set out in the following chapters:

- Planning and implementation (Chapter 2);
- Customer service (Chapter 3);
- Organisational change (Chapter 4);
- Communication and stakeholder engagement (Chapter 5).

## 2. Planning and Implementation

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*This chapter examines the planning and implementation of the BBCSA program.*

### Introduction

**2.1** The BBCSA program was expected to have a significant impact on CSA through expanding its workforce and operations, and changing its culture and service delivery. It was implemented concurrently with the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance program.

**2.2** Between the announcement of the Child Support Reforms in February 2006, and commencement from 1 July 2006, CSA was required to finalise funding arrangements in addition to planning for the implementation of the changes. Therefore, despite some preliminary work being done prior to February 2006, this meant that planning was undertaken in a compressed timeframe.

**2.3** To assess if CSA effectively planned and implemented the BBCSA program, the ANAO assessed CSA's application of key project management arrangements, including:

- governance arrangements;
- budget management;
- scheduling;
- communication; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

**2.4** The ANAO also examined the adequacy of CSA's planning and management of organisational functions required to support implementation of the BBCSA program; in particular, training and development and workforce management.

### Project management

**2.5** The structure and delivery of the Child Support Scheme had remained relatively unchanged in the 20 years prior to the introduction of the reforms. Consequently, CSA had limited large-scale project management experience, skills and frameworks to support implementation of the Child Support Reforms. CSA was therefore required to develop and implement systems,

processes and frameworks to support implementation of the Child Support Reforms.

**2.6** Given the BBCSA program was part of the Child Support Reforms, CSA adopted a similar project management framework for all three parts of the Reforms. This framework was examined in ANAO Audit Report No.19 2009–10, *Child Support Reforms: Stage One of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance*. Therefore, the following section only addresses those project management issues specifically related to the BBCSA program.

## **Governance arrangements**

**2.7** CSA's governance framework (refer Appendix 1) was only agreed in-principle in July 2006—after commencement of the BBCSA program—and was not finally agreed until April 2007. The project management framework, including the business plan and risk management templates, was also introduced with the governance arrangements. Shortcomings were identified by BBCSA project managers in the governance and project management arrangements, including:

- the delayed introduction of the governance and project management arrangements meant that project managers were not adequately supported to plan and manage their projects;
- inadequate risk management processes, including the absence of a formal process for the escalation of risks and issues; and
- the role of CSA's Project Office<sup>20</sup> to provide advice and oversee risk and issue reporting was unclear.

**2.8** To avoid delaying the implementation of the Child Support Reforms projects, in July 2006, CSA's Executive approved the commencement of some projects despite acknowledging that they were not adequately scoped or developed. For some projects, lack of clarity around scope continued to be an issue during implementation. For example, the Change of Assessment (COA) Reform project was approved in July 2006 but from April 2007 to August 2007, the project team indicated to CSA's National Executive Change (NEC)<sup>21</sup> that it was unclear of its project scope. The COA Reform project did not complete the

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<sup>20</sup> Refer Appendix 1.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

scope of work necessary to deliver intended outcomes (refer paragraphs 3.27 to 3.33), and CSA is currently implementing a new COA Reform project.

**2.9** To assist project managers to plan and manage projects to deliver intended outcomes, CSA would have benefited from implementing governance and project management processes earlier—preferably prior to project planning and confirming that projects were adequately planned prior to approving commencement. This would have assisted project managers to better identify and manage risks; confirm the direction and scope of projects; and more reliably estimate project timeframes and resource requirements.

## **Budget management**

**2.10** In planning the Child Support Reforms, CSA did not adequately consider the costs associated with implementation. The scale of the Child Support Reforms required rapid and significant expansion of many of CSA's support functions such as its training and development, accommodation and workforce management, as well as the establishment of a Project Office.<sup>22</sup> CSA also underestimated the costs associated with implementing individual projects. As a result, BBSCA projects had their budgets uniformly reduced to cover costs such as project management consultants.<sup>23</sup>

**2.11** As a result of these reductions, insufficient budget resources were identified as an issue for some BBSCA projects and in some cases impacted on the ability of a project to meet its outcomes. Examples of the impact of these reductions included:

- the training and development requirements of some projects needed to be reassessed as there were insufficient funds to cover the activities that were initially planned and scoped by CSA's Training and Development program (refer paragraphs 2.39 to 2.40);
- the Regional Service Centres project (refer paragraphs 3.11 to 3.17) experienced difficulties in sufficiently funding some of the elements of the project, including the new team leader and technical support officer roles; and

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> This process applied to all of the Child Support Reforms projects.

- the Levers of Change project (refer paragraphs 4.7 to 4.8) deferred some key project deliverables, such as the procurement of a formal leadership development program.

**2.12** Further, a review of the Organisational Change program commissioned by CSA, found that the:

approach towards the delivery of change into CSA is viewed by Projects as being driven by the budget and less so by what is needed for it to succeed. The constraints placed on Projects to implement short-term change initiatives for what are longer-term requirements have left Organisational Change Projects lacking confidence in the CSA's ability to sustain cultural change.<sup>24</sup>

## Scheduling

**2.13** Scheduling systems can be used to identify program dependencies. CSA did not have an integrated scheduling system that enabled the required reporting until 16 months after the commencement of the BBSCA program. CSA did, however, have an interim solution available from June 2007 that identified shortcomings including limited staff and technical support for using and maintaining the system<sup>25</sup> and restricted access to project teams due to log-on restrictions.<sup>26</sup>

**2.14** Without an integrated scheduling system during program implementation, CSA's Executive and Project Office were unable to independently monitor the progress of projects against milestones. Consequently, many projects were working towards delayed schedules that had not been endorsed by CSA's Executive or the Project Office who were, therefore, unaware of slipped milestones until October 2007, when project schedules were visible through the newly implemented scheduling system.

**2.15** In reviews of the Organisational Change and New Service Delivery Model programs, it was noted that neither program had effectively identified interdependencies in schedules. Not recognising some of the critical

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<sup>24</sup> Child Support Agency, *Organisational Change: WDP Integration & Assurance Workshop (Report and Action Plan)*, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Support was limited as the scheduling system was hosted on a US-based server and CSA could not identify a service provider that supported the scheduling system in Australia.

<sup>26</sup> The system was only available using standalone laptops. CSA purchased 40 laptops to support the system which were distributed to particular staff and areas. Consequently, access to the scheduling system was limited to staff that could access these laptops.

interdependencies between projects during implementation impacted on the effectiveness of some projects including:

- Performance Management Framework – customer-focus training was rolled out to staff before the introduction of the revised Performance Management Framework (refer paragraphs 4.12 to 4.14) that contained updated performance measures reflecting CSA’s new organisational focus. Implementation of the new Framework, prior to, or concurrent with, the customer-focus training, may have assisted CSA to deliver sustainable change by motivating staff to display desired behaviours; and
- Personalised Services project – as at December 2007, the Personalised Services project had 53 outstanding ICT issues, some of which created considerable administrative workload for personalised services teams. The outstanding issues reflected the large workload that the ICT division was expected to undertake across a number of BBCSA projects.

**2.16** Earlier implementation of CSA’s scheduling system could have assisted CSA’s Executive, Project Office and project managers to better monitor progress against milestones and identify interdependencies. This would have then allowed projects to be aligned to maximise the impact and effectiveness of outputs.

## **Communication to staff**

**2.17** Effective communication is required to garner commitment and support from those involved with implementation of projects. Communication is an important part of a change process, and becomes increasingly important with large-scale change as organisations need to communicate messages to stakeholders such as the reasons for, and the expected benefits and impacts of the changes.<sup>27</sup>

**2.18** CSA undertook a range of activities aimed at informing staff about the progress of implementation of the Child Support Reforms, including establishing a dedicated intranet page, developing a Team Leader Toolkit, sending emails to all staff (including Executive updates) and conducting a roadshow program involving members of its Executive travelling around

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<sup>27</sup> ANAO and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Implementation of Programme and Policy Initiatives*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. 47.

Australia to deliver presentations to staff. CSA advised the ANAO that its approach was to communicate changes to staff on a project-by-project basis, rather than implement an integrated communications strategy. Some project teams reported that this approach worked effectively, however, other project teams indicated that communication was an area that could have been improved.

**2.19** CSA's External Delivery Assurance Advisor (EDAA) (refer paragraph 2.24) repeatedly identified internal communication as an issue in reports to CSA's NEC and also identified internal communication capability as a key lesson learnt from implementation of the Child Support Reforms. The EDAA reported that the Child Support Reforms had 'suffered from an inability to describe the future it is building to other areas of the business and engage and excite it.'<sup>28</sup> For example, CSA's EDAA identified that the role and purpose of the Organisational Change program was unclear within CSA for the first nine months of the program. This finding may have been due to CSA's approach of promoting projects separately rather than as components of programs aimed at delivering overarching objectives.

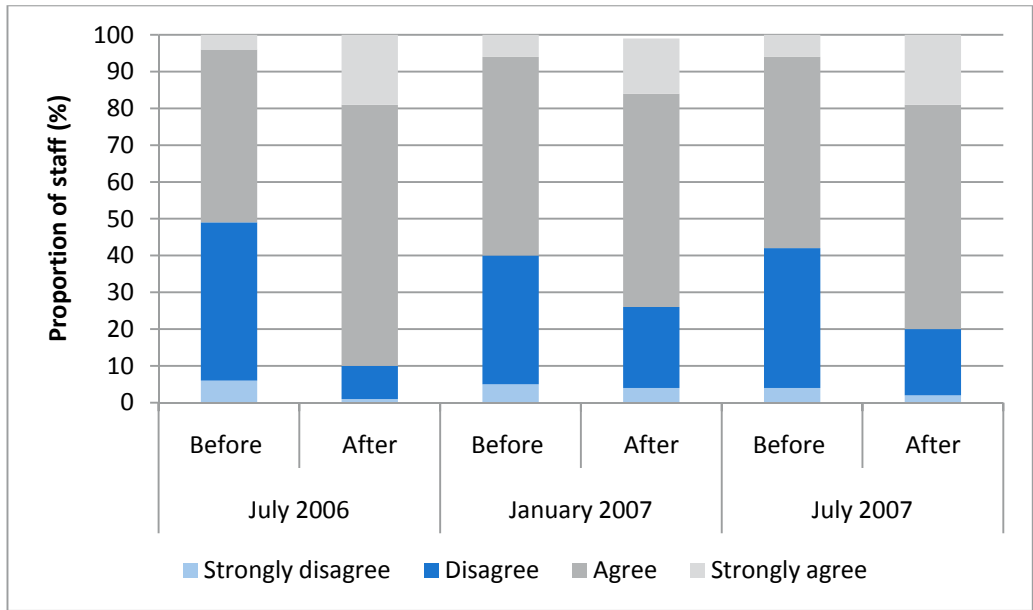
**2.20** CSA used the roadshows as its key tool to communicate changes to staff. Figure 2.1 shows results from a survey conducted in conjunction with the roadshows between July 2006 and July 2007 which indicate they were effective in improving staff understanding of the changes. However, the roadshows were six months apart, and consequently, prior to each roadshow between 40 to 50 per cent of survey respondents indicated they did not have sufficient information about the changes affecting their work.

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<sup>28</sup> Child Support Agency, *EDAA Report for October 2007: Lessons for the Future*, 2007.

**Figure 2.1**

**Staff responses before and after roadshows to the statement, ‘I have the information I need about the change program\* that will impact on me and my work’, between July 2006 and July 2007**



Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

\* The Change Program was the term used within CSA to refer to the Child Support Reforms.

**2.21** Given the rapid and significant change being implemented by CSA during this period, employing a communication approach that delivered information regularly to staff and used the roadshows to emphasise key messages could have enabled staff to be continually kept informed of changes. This approach could have also assisted CSA to better engage staff and sustain their commitment to the overall BBCSA objectives.

## Monitoring and evaluation

**2.22** CSA had processes to monitor the day-to-day implementation of projects and introduced a framework to assess the impact of the BBCSA program.



## *The implementation of the BBCSA program*

### Progress reporting

**2.23** Project managers reported progress against indicators at regular intervals through CSA's internal change governance structure<sup>29</sup> to DHS, FaHCSIA and the Cabinet Implementation Unit. As part of progress reporting, projects and programs reported risks and issues. Reviews of the New Service Delivery Model and Organisational Change programs found that the programs were operating without defined risk tolerances. Consequently, risks and issues were reported without clear prioritisation of their significance, and while the CSA Executive intended to use project reporting to inform decision-making, its usefulness was limited by the 'poor quality'<sup>30</sup> of information provided.

### External Delivery Assurance Advisor

**2.24** At the commencement of the Child Support Reforms, CSA engaged a full-time EDAA to monitor implementation. The EDAA's role was to provide an objective assessment on the progress of programs and projects. The EDAA presented monthly reports on a broad range of implementation issues at NEC meetings. These reports highlighted critical issues and recommended adjustments to improve the implementation of the Child Support Reforms. The EDAA performed a valuable role and had a positive impact on the implementation of the Child Support Reforms by identifying the need for important project management activities, such as developing a plan to transition project activities to business-as-usual operations.

## *The impact of the BBCSA program*

### Evaluation Framework

**2.25** CSA developed an evaluation framework to measure the impact of the implementation of the BBCSA program. The BBCSA Evaluation Framework links the objectives of the BBCSA program to CSA's strategic organisational goals, which have since been incorporated into its *Program Plan for 2009–13*.<sup>31</sup> It also identifies key performance indicators and information sources to measure the achievement of the objectives.

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<sup>29</sup> Refer Appendix 1.

<sup>30</sup> Child Support Agency, *Change Program Status Reporting Issues*, email, 5 April 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Child Support Agency, *Child Support – Program Plan 2009-2013* [internet]. Child Support Agency, Canberra, 2009, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/publications/ProgramPlan2009-2013/Index.aspx>> [accessed 18 November 2009].

**2.26** The effectiveness of the BBCSA Evaluation Framework in monitoring the impact of the BBCSA program was limited by a number of factors including:

- the Framework was not endorsed until nine months after the commencement of the BBCSA program (March 2007);
- some key performance indicators and data measurement sources changed so results could not be correlated across time; and
- some key performance indicators did not have data measurement sources.

#### Reporting on the BBCSA program

**2.27** CSA produced three internal reports on the impact of the BBCSA program on customers, staff and stakeholders, which were based on the BBCSA Evaluation Framework. The two checkpoint reports (completed in September 2007 and February 2008) and one outcomes report (completed in July 2008), outlined the key achievements of the BBCSA program and performance against process and some outcome indicators.

**2.28** The BBCSA program was expected to deliver ongoing future benefits to CSA and consequently, CSA has received funding until the end of 2009–10 for operational costs associated with the BBCSA program, such as staff costs. From December 2007 to March 2008, CSA transitioned the BBCSA projects into business-as-usual operations and there has been no reporting focused on the impact of the BBCSA program since July 2008.

**2.29** CSA does not have an approach to measure the ongoing impact of the initiatives in the BBCSA program in delivering sustained change. Accordingly, CSA would benefit from monitoring the impact of changes on an ongoing basis to determine if the BBCSA projects have been effective in achieving sustained change and to identify where further changes are necessary to achieve intended objectives.

## Recommendation No.1

**2.30** To assess the effectiveness of the BBCSA program in delivering permanent changes and identify opportunities for further improvement, the ANAO recommends that CSA review, develop and continue to monitor the relevant key performance indicators identified in the BBCSA evaluation framework.

**2.31 DHS response:** Agree.

The key performance indicators identified within the BBCSA evaluation framework have been absorbed into the CSA organisational performance reports to reflect current business and Government priorities. The key performance indicators for BBCSA related to:

- customer service improvement projects
- organisational change projects
- communication and stakeholder engagement projects.

These now form part of both the CSA's organisational reporting mechanism as well as organisational improvement cycles.

### *Reviews*

#### Project reviews

**2.32** Four BBCSA project teams produced evaluations on the impact that the projects had on customers, staff and/or stakeholders. This initiative was important for determining whether projects have achieved their intended outcomes and identifying where further work may be required. However, the quality of the project evaluations was compromised by shortcomings in data accuracy and the inability of CSA's central IT system (Cuba) to support the extent of reporting required.

**2.33** The Regional Service Centre, Increased Online Services and Personalised Services project teams independently developed a range of manual reporting systems in an attempt to address these shortcomings. Regional Service Centres retain the manual reporting system; CSAonline has ceased its manual reporting; and the personalised services reporting has been automated and incorporated into CSA's central reporting system. CSA is currently unable to easily and reliably generate reporting on some functions that were initiated or expanded during the BBCSA program, including customer usage of online services and the proportion of customer calls that are recorded.

## Post-implementation reviews

**2.34** Some BBCSA programs and projects completed end-of-phase and end-of-project/program post-implementation reviews. The reviews contained an examination of whether projects and programs had achieved planned targets and process milestones; identified areas that could have been improved or were successful; and recommended the closure of projects and/or the transfer of functions to business-as-usual teams within CSA.

## External review

**2.35** In November 2009, a review commissioned by the Secretary of DHS, *Delivering Quality Outcomes: Consistency, Continuity and Confidence*, was released. The purpose of the report was to assess the decision-making processes and quality assurance arrangements in CSA.<sup>32</sup> The review was not specific to the BBCSA program, however, it investigated activities that formed part of the program, including Regional Service Centres, personalised services and the change of assessment process.

## Supporting functions

**2.36** In 2007–08, at the peak of implementing the reforms, CSA's departmental appropriation had increased by almost 60 per cent and its staffing level had increased by 20 per cent, compared to 2005–06 levels. CSA required systems, processes and resources to manage this impact on the organisation and assist with managing implementation of the reforms.

**2.37** The BBCSA program provided the opportunity for CSA to assess its existing organisational strengths and weaknesses and address those areas requiring development. In planning the BBCSA program, rather than including an assessment of its capacity to implement the Child Support Reforms, CSA limited the scope of the program to an assessment of its weaknesses that affected its interactions with customers and stakeholders.

**2.38** Consequently, CSA did not adequately identify or plan for the necessary enhancements to supporting functions, such as training and development and workforce management, required for implementation of the Child Support Reforms. The enhancements to these functions represented

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<sup>32</sup> Richmond D, *Delivering Quality Outcomes: Consistency, Continuity and Confidence*, Australian Government, Canberra.

some of the costs that CSA was subsequently required to partially fund from the BBCSA program.

## **Training and development**

**2.39** CSA recognised in 2006 that its existing training and development capacity was insufficient to support the implementation of the Child Support Reforms and therefore, CSA established a dedicated Training and Development program. In 2007, this program became responsible for all of CSA's training and development needs.

**2.40** In most cases the Training and Development program delivered the training required by projects. CSA could have improved this process, however, by clarifying and promulgating the roles and responsibilities of the program and projects; providing program resourcing commensurate with workload requirements; and developing a schedule of training requirements at an earlier stage.

## **Workforce management**

**2.41** In order to deliver the Child Support Reforms, CSA expected to recruit over 1000 staff. This meant that workforce planning including staff retention strategies and associated issues, such as accommodation, were important considerations. The need for workforce plans and a staff retention strategy were identified during a planning workshop for implementation of the Child Support Reforms in June 2006. However, despite the recognition of the need for such work, insufficient steps were taken to identify and address the issues.

### ***Workforce Plans***

**2.42** Workforce plans were particularly important as prior to the Child Support Reforms, CSA had not developed a projection of workforce requirements across its organisation. In September 2006, CSA's NEC approved a Workforce Coordination project, as part of the BBCSA program, to forecast and coordinate CSA's Child Support Reforms workforce, including arranging accommodation.

**2.43** Given that most of the Child Support Reforms projects were approved to commence in July 2006, with lead-up work taking place in the months before, the establishment of this project in September 2006 meant that it was too late to effectively manage recruitment. This was confirmed by a review of the project which found that CSA's expected workforce growth was:

based on initial budget estimates of affordable staffing levels before the decisions had been made on roles and levels in many instances. As each of the projects progressed, staffing profiles were determined and the staffing numbers and location were revised...However, it is fair to say that from a project perspective, some of these decisions around staffing requirements within NPP<sup>33</sup> programs advised to the project, particularly in the second half of 06/07 FY [Financial Year], appeared to be taken without the level of rigour or affordability scrutiny required by the governance framework.<sup>34</sup>

**2.44** Consequently, for some BBCSA programs, including the New Service Delivery Model, staffing levels were beyond affordable levels and resulted in program budget overspends. In 2008, CSA produced a strategic workforce plan that indicates for CSA's workforce to be within an affordable level, it would need to reduce staffing levels by 410 in 2008–09 and a further 420 in 2009–10. CSA advised the ANAO that the 2008 strategic workforce plan has been superseded partly due to considerable structural change through the integration with DHS, the negotiation of a new funding agreement that commenced on 1 July 2009, and more recently, the wider reforms within the Human Services portfolio. As a consequence, CSA is unable to determine whether the planned staffing reductions were achieved, however, it did advise that it has operated within the affordable budget for financial years 2008–09 and 2009–10 (year to date).

### *Retention*

**2.45** In CSA's 2008–12 *Strategic Workforce Plan*, attrition is identified as 'CSA's most critical workforce issue'.<sup>35</sup> At the peak of implementing the Child Support Reforms in 2007–08, staff turnover was estimated by DHS to have cost CSA \$15 million.<sup>36</sup> Just over half this expense (\$8 million) was associated with the turnover of Customer Service Officer level three positions which are mainly entry-level customer service positions.

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<sup>33</sup> For most new program initiatives a 'new policy proposal' (NPP) process is undertaken that includes the identification of program costs. During implementation of the Child Support Reforms, CSA categorised resources as either NPP or business-as-usual (BAU).

<sup>34</sup> Child Support Agency, *Workforce Co-ordination*, 2008, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> Child Support Agency, *CSA Strategic Workforce Plan 2008-12*, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

**2.46** Attrition at this level represents a significant cost to CSA in terms of the additional work associated with recruitment, training and induction of new staff. In 2007–08, training resources were of particular significance for CSA as it conducted the customer-focus training among other technical training associated with stage three of the Child Support Scheme Reforms.

**2.47** Given the scope of change planned as part of the Child Support Reforms and the significant level of recruitment planned, CSA would have benefited from implementing a retention strategy that addressed both existing and new staff.

### *Accommodation*

**2.48** Accommodation needs are associated with staffing levels and were an ongoing issue for CSA during implementation of the Child Support Reforms. The importance of this issue was reflected in the topic being a standing agenda item for NEC meetings for 12 months. Initially, insufficient accommodation was the primary concern and strategies were put in place to address this. However, in October 2007, CSA realised that it had too much accommodation and began investigating options to manage the associated lease costs into the future. Had CSA conducted its analysis on expected workforce requirements prior to the commencement of the Child Support Reforms, it would have been better positioned from the outset to plan accommodation needs based on projected staff levels.

## Conclusion

**2.49** The BBCSA program was a central component of the Child Support Reforms. In adopting a common project management framework for implementing the Reforms, CSA recognised that it had limited in-house experience and capacity to deliver a significant organisational change program and took steps, such as engaging project management consultants, to assist them in the process. Despite these measures, CSA did not adequately plan the implementation of the BBCSA program. As a result, shortcomings in governance and project management arrangements (such as the delayed introduction of some arrangements), impacted on the effectiveness of some project activities and therefore the success of the program.

**2.50** CSA monitored the implementation of the BBCSA program through the development of an evaluation framework, progress reporting, reviews and the use of an External Delivery Assurance Advisor. These arrangements, however, were limited in some areas including:

- the framework was not developed until ten months after the program commenced;
- CSA did not have a system to monitor projects' progress against milestones for the first 12 months of the program;
- the attention of CSA's Executive was repeatedly diverted to managing organisational issues, such as workforce affordability and accommodation constraints; and
- measures were not identified or developed for all performance indicators.



## 3. Customer Service

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*This chapter examines the customer service improvement objective of the BBCSA program and the related projects.*

### Introduction

**3.1** As part of the BBCSA program, CSA received \$106 million over four years to improve customer service through:

developing a customer-focused approach to service delivery, characterised by more accessible, consistent, responsive, professional, accountable and empathetic interactions with customers.

**3.2** To assess CSA's progress in improving customer service, the ANAO reviewed the seven projects undertaken that were designed to improve aspects of customer service, and their performance against the targets set by CSA. The ANAO also assessed CSA's performance against the relevant customer service performance indicators contained in the BBCSA Evaluation Framework.

### Customer service improvement projects

**3.3** In 2005–06 community concerns about CSA's unsatisfactory customer service were reflected in large numbers of complaints about child support issues to CSA, Members of Parliament and the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Ombudsman), and attention in the media. An external review of CSA's operations commissioned by CSA identified areas of particular concern including: CSA's limited capacity to case manage customers with sensitive or complex issues that remain unresolved; a lack of management support available to CSOs due to team leaders' high workloads; and minimal face-to-face customer services in regional areas.<sup>37</sup> The review also identified stakeholder concerns with the perceived lack of accountability that CSA staff had for the decisions that they made.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Child Support Agency, *Strategic Review*, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

**3.4** Separately, CSA also identified other areas for customer service improvement including its lengthy, complex and costly change of assessment process; the inability of CSA's IT systems architecture to support business needs; and improving the range of services available online to CSA customers.

**3.5** Based on the review of CSA's operations and the self-identified areas for improvement, CSA undertook seven projects, as outlined in Table 3.1, aimed at improving particular aspects of its customer service.

**Table 3.1**

**Customer service improvement projects**

Project	Outcomes and components
Team Size and Support Restructure	<p>The Team Size and Support Restructure project aimed to improve the performance and capability of CSA's service delivery teams and increase staff satisfaction with technical support. The project had three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce team sizes and recruit more Team Leaders;</li> <li>• change the way CSA staff access technical advice; and</li> <li>• change the role of Team Leaders.</li> </ul>
Regional Service Centres (RSC)	<p>The RSC project aimed to improve customer outcomes and increase customer satisfaction by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing the level of face-to-face services provided by CSA;</li> <li>• establishing five new RSCs; and</li> <li>• developing a new national RSC service model.</li> </ul>
Personalised Services	<p>The Personalised Services project aimed to develop and implement a case management approach that could be used to resolve complex or repeat issues for customers.</p>
Change of Assessment (COA) Reform	<p>The COA Reform project aimed to simplify COA application and review procedures by introducing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• open exchange of COA applications between parents;</li> <li>• a phone-based COA application pilot;</li> <li>• revised case management; and</li> <li>• improved assistance, training and reference material.</li> </ul>
Increased Online Services	<p>The Increased Online Services project aimed to improve customer service and business efficiency through expanding the range of online services available to customers, employers and financial institutions.</p>
Call Recording	<p>The Call Recording project aimed to increase customer and stakeholder confidence in CSA's service delivery by increasing organisational accountability through the implementation of a system to record, store and replay all customer calls received and made by CSA.</p>
IT System Architecture	<p>The IT System Architecture project aimed to review CSA's IT architecture to identify gaps and determine a future IT architecture flexible enough to meet CSA's requirements.</p>

Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

## Team Size and Support Restructure project

3.6 Prior to implementation of the BBCSA program, inconsistent advice from CSOs was a persistent concern for customers and stakeholders and was reflected in complaints to CSA and the Ombudsman. The Team Size and Support Restructure project intended to address this issue and improve the performance capability of CSA's service delivery teams by changing team composition and redefining some roles, and increasing CSOs satisfaction with the level of technical support available to them. The Team Size and Support Restructure project involved:

- increasing the number of team leaders and refocusing their role;
- reducing the size of customer service teams;
- removing the technical support function from the team leader role and introducing business support officers to assist team leaders with administrative tasks; and
- replacing 'coaches'<sup>39</sup> in teams with technical support officers (TSOs) that CSOs could access via phone, email or face-to-face meetings.

3.7 CSA has progressively implemented the changes that formed part of the Team Size and Support Restructure project including reducing team sizes<sup>40</sup>, increasing the number of team leaders<sup>41</sup> and focusing their role more on management and leadership, and introducing a centralised TSO function for CSOs to use. From an operational perspective, however, the changes have presented some difficulties, including:

- Team leaders have retained responsibility for responding to customer calls escalated from CSOs, which typically involve a technical component. New team leaders, however, did not receive technical training as CSA determined that this was not required in the revised team leader role. Both an internal CSA review and ANAO interviews with CSOs conducted as part of the audit highlighted that in some cases team leaders have been unable to effectively manage escalated

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<sup>39</sup> A coach was part of each customer service team and provided face-to-face, ongoing technical support for CSOs. In 2006 there were 256 coaches and they were replaced by 240 technical support officers.

<sup>40</sup> From an average of 20.4 staff in 2006 to 12.5 staff in 2009.

<sup>41</sup> From 157 as at 30 June 2006 to 296 as at 30 June 2009.

customer complaint calls. This change has also impacted on team leaders' capacity to deliver performance feedback and advice to CSOs.<sup>42</sup>

- Creating and centralising the TSO role was expected to improve the consistency of technical advice, however, work to systematically quality assure CSO decisions, monitor CSO development needs and analyse technical issue trends has not been undertaken.<sup>43</sup> In this regard, CSA advised that it is working on an enhancement to improve reporting of quality checks undertaken by TSOs, which could assist it to identify common issues for CSOs.
- CSA centralised TSOs to provide for consistent and accurate advice to CSOs. This process was not supported by adequate training and guidance to cultivate a consistent understanding amongst TSOs of technical and policy issues. Consequently, the impact of this change has been limited and this has resulted in practices such as CSOs contacting a number of TSOs for different advice or directly contacting the TSO located in their office rather than going through the centralised process.<sup>44</sup>

**3.8** The combination of these operational issues has impacted on the ability of CSOs to provide consistent advice to customers and stakeholders. The issues identified could be addressed through improved training that is tailored to specific roles, and implementing better mechanisms to allow TSO advice to be more consistent, accurate and address the needs of CSOs.

## Recommendation No.2

**3.9** To improve CSA's capacity to respond to customers, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- align the training available to team leaders and technical support officers with their roles and responsibilities; and
- enhance the consistency and accuracy of technical advice available to customer service officers.

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<sup>42</sup> Child Support Agency, *Impact of TSSR Initiatives Evaluation Report*, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

### 3.10 DHS response: Agree.

CSA has undertaken a number of steps to improve the technical and service capabilities of our staff. In 2008–09 and 2009–10 over 200 technical support officers participated in 'Building Technical Capability' workshops. These national sessions were designed and delivered by the CSA senior technical group and specifically targeted complex cases. The sessions enabled discussion of technical topics resulting in a consistent understanding of issues. Technical support officers have also been involved in developing and delivering technical updates to customer service officers based on nationally consistent material.

In April 2010 training for all team leaders in the effective resolution of escalated complaints was conducted. This training also included a component on providing effective and timely feedback to staff on their management of the issue leading to the complaint. In addition, team leaders are now required to attend technical training with their teams to ensure they are building their own knowledge and understanding of the issues raised.

In recognition of the importance placed on team leaders possessing a sufficient degree of business knowledge by the 'Delivering Quality Outcomes' review, CSA has also commenced a project to improve the technical skills of team leaders and staff. This will include the development of revised position descriptions for team leader and technical support officer roles and training modules to skill staff in these competencies.

## Regional Service Centre project

**3.11** Regional Service Centres (RSCs) are small CSA offices co-located with other Human Services portfolio agencies' offices that customers can visit to discuss their case with CSOs. The RSC project was introduced to improve customer service by increasing the number of CSA customers that had face-to-face access to CSOs. The project had three key outcomes which were to:

- establish five new RSCs;
- develop and implement a nationally consistent RSC model; and
- increase the level of face-to-face services available to customers in regional communities.

**3.12** CSA was successful in establishing five new RSCs and implementing a new RSC model, although there have been some implementation issues with these changes. The timing between approval of the five new RSC locations and

their opening dates left a condensed timeframe for CSA to establish the offices. In one instance there were three weeks between approval and opening, which was insufficient time for the RSC to become fully operational or recruit new staff prior to opening. Once recruited, the staff in all new RSCs undertook a compressed training program that did not cover the broad range of functions that RSC staff are expected to undertake. From an overall perspective, RSC staffing levels have remained relatively steady (increasing by 0.1 FTE between 2006–07 and 2008–09), despite the expansion in the RSCs' role.

**3.13** CSA has not been as successful in delivering its planned increase in services—RSCs provided fewer face-to-face services than planned during 2008–09.<sup>45</sup> Further, the effectiveness of RSCs has been impacted by inefficiencies including:

- increased administrative workloads for CSOs to prepare for, and conduct, mobile circuits;
- limited customer attendance at some events; and
- duplicate administrative effort for RSC reporting requirements.

**3.14** As part of the RSC project, mobile circuits involve one or more staff members visiting a neighbouring town or suburb to meet with CSA customers to discuss their child support matters. CSA intended to deliver a mobile ICT platform that provided CSOs with access to CSA's customer database, Cuba, so that customer information could be accessed and updated while CSOs met with customers. However, this was not introduced until mid-2009<sup>46</sup>, and consequently, extensive administrative effort was required for CSOs to conduct mobile circuits, which lessened opportunities for customer meetings in other regional areas.

**3.15** Limited attendance at customer events has also impacted on the effectiveness of customer contact activities. Of the 2055 visits by RSCs in 2008–09<sup>47</sup>, 30 per cent of events conducted by RSCs had no attendees and a

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<sup>45</sup> RSC staff saw more customers in their offices (33 159 planned compared to 37 717 actual) and fewer customers in their community (20 364 planned compared to 3924 actual) than anticipated.

<sup>46</sup> This is when CSA disengaged from the ATO's information technology platform, which it had been using since 1988.

<sup>47</sup> The accuracy of the figure derived is limited because town/suburb/community names are not linked to states and some locations are listed as places (e.g. Legal Aid office) rather than town/suburb/community name.

further 30 per cent had one to five attendees. In addition, 37 per cent of community information sessions<sup>48</sup> and 47 per cent of community events had five or less attendees, indicating that the selection of event type, time or location could be improved.

**3.16** Reporting on the RSC activities was not available until July 2008 when the project team introduced a database for RSCs to record customer and community outreach activities. Entering information in the RSC database is in addition to RSCs' requirements to record relevant customer information, such as changes to customers' details, in Cuba. ANAO analysis of the RSC database identified shortcomings in data capture and reporting including blank fields, dates entered outside the range of activity, and multiple RSCs sharing the same data code. The duplicate administrative effort and accuracy of data could be addressed by incorporating the data requirements in Cuba, or extracting relevant customer and stakeholder data from Cuba.

## Recommendation No.3

**3.17** To assist Regional Service Centres (RSCs) meet their objective of increasing customer access to services, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- assess whether the expected outcomes of RSCs align with the resources available;
- improve its planning and targeting of RSC outreach activities; and
- investigate opportunities to streamline administrative processes for RSCs.

**3.18 DHS response:** Agree.

A review of the services provided by RSCs is currently underway. As a result of this review CSA will develop a revised purpose and outcomes framework and will then align the services delivered consistent with this framework. The framework being developed will take account of available resources and guide the decisions on priority activities. The review will deliver its recommendations in late 2010. The outreach services delivered through RSCs are also being reviewed and the review will recommend changes to ensure that

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<sup>48</sup> Community information sessions are conducted by CSA, along with legal, financial and parenting groups within the community. These sessions focus on providing information about the child support scheme, and they aim to help parents examine their options and make choices on how they can both be responsible for the financial wellbeing of their children. These sessions are open to all members of the public and are free of charge.

effective customer and stakeholder engagement activities are conducted, consistent with overall CSA objectives and within available resources. This review will deliver its recommendations by 30 June 2010.

In relation to the streamlining of administrative processes, the introduction of the mobile computing platform in mid 2009 has seen the time dedicated to the preparation and follow up from outreach activities significantly reduce. The RSC database remains the primary reporting tool for outreach activities and capturing volumes of counter activities. The effectiveness of this database is being considered as a part of the review.

## **Personalised Services project**

**3.19** In 2005, stakeholders were concerned that complex child support cases were not receiving necessary attention and this was reflected in the number of customers that were passing repeatedly through multiple CSA processes (such as complaints and objections about CSA decisions) without having their issues resolved. In response to these concerns, CSA introduced a case management approach (known as personalised services) for customers who seek external resolution of their issues<sup>49</sup> or use CSA processes<sup>50</sup> multiple times.

**3.20** Personalised services CSOs offer ongoing, tailored<sup>51</sup> services to CSA's most dissatisfied customers and aim to resolve their issues in a timely manner by working with relevant CSA business areas. This approach is different from the present role of the majority of CSOs, as most CSOs do not have a caseload to manage and respond to customer queries as they arise.<sup>52</sup> Initially, CSA expected to resolve 12 000 cases each year through the personalised services approach, however, this was reduced to 6000 cases following a pilot. CSA has exceeded its revised target in 2007–08 (9062 cases resolved) and 2008–09 (10 990 cases resolved).

**3.21** The personalised services customer selection model targets two customer segments: customers who have escalated issues to senior staff in CSA or to individuals or groups outside of CSA (reactive referral); and customers who use CSA's issue resolution processes, such as a formal objection to a CSA

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<sup>49</sup> Through a Minister, Member of Parliament, the media or the Ombudsman.

<sup>50</sup> Such as change of assessment, objections and complaints.

<sup>51</sup> Including offering to meet face-to-face.

<sup>52</sup> Child Support Agency, *Recommendations for Implementing a New Customer Approach*, 2007, p. 3.



decision, multiple times (proactive selection). CSA prioritises reactive cases<sup>53</sup>, however, these cases do not necessarily represent the most complex cases that personalised services was established to address.

**3.22** Not all customers that fit the personalised services customer selection model are accepted for case management. Between July 2007 and September 2009, the number of customers that met the personalised services criteria (67 895)<sup>54</sup> was far greater than the number of customers that were actively managed by personalised services (16 414). These figures indicate that, based on the current selection criteria, the number of potential personalised services customers outweighs CSA's capacity to service these customers.

**3.23** The number of external complaints by customers is also increasing, and therefore, it is likely that the pool of potential reactive customers will increase, further reducing personalised services' capacity to accept and manage customers pro-actively selected by CSA.

**3.24** Given the limits on CSA's capacity to provide personalised services to a likely growing section of its customer base, CSA would benefit from also using its personalised services approach to inform improved service delivery solutions by using feedback from customers to identify and address common causes of dissatisfaction.

## Recommendation No.4

**3.25** The ANAO recommends that, in order to assist in improving overall customer service, CSA use the information gathered through personalised services to identify and address systemic issues experienced by customers when interacting with CSA.

**3.26 DHS response:** Agree.

This recommendation complements the findings of the Delivering Quality Outcomes review. In response to the review, CSA has implemented a new Service Delivery Model supported by a new national business line organisational structure. As part of this structure, a Customer Review and Quality Improvement (CRQI) national business line has been established to

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<sup>53</sup> Between May and July 2009 the ratio of reactive to proactive cases was 4:1.

<sup>54</sup> This figure indicates the number of instances when customers have been identified as potential personalised services customers. Customers may have multiple instances of being identified as potential personalised services customers.

support customers with entrenched conflict or complex needs as well as customers who want a formal review of a decision made or outcome delivered by CSA.

The business line has commenced the identification and escalation of systemic issues in conjunction with the Program Management Division of CSA and is currently establishing a process that provides feedback to other business lines where escalations occur as a result of an action in that business line. A new Quality Analysis function within the Program Management Division is being developed and will have responsibility across CSA for prioritising systemic service delivery issues and ensuring they are addressed by the relevant area or business line.

In addition, the Delivering Quality Outcomes review recommended a review of the effectiveness of the Personalised Services approach. This review will be conducted and will encompass various aspects of the Personalised Services approach including the scope for this area to provide feedback on the identification of systemic service delivery issues. The review will be completed by December 2010.

## **Change of Assessment Reform project**

**3.27** If a CSA customer believes their child support assessment does not reflect their, their children's or the other parent's circumstances, they can apply for a change of assessment (COA). Customers' COA applications must meet one of ten legislated reasons for changing an assessment.<sup>55</sup>

**3.28** The COA process is subject to a relatively large number of complaints, objections and appeals and, historically, has been the subject of review. In a 2004 report, the Ombudsman identified deficiencies in the COA decision-making process which resulted in 12 recommendations involving improved training and guidance and the introduction of new processes. These findings were supported by a CSA internal assessment in 2006, which identified the COA process as lengthy (customers on average took 65 days to receive a decision), complex and costly to administer (average \$963 per application).

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<sup>55</sup> Sections 98C and 117 of the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*.

**3.29** The COA reforms project aimed to reduce erroneous COA applications (ineligible, withdrawn, invalid and refused applications); improve customer satisfaction with the COA process; and introduce changes that are acceptable to customers and efficient for CSA.<sup>56</sup> To achieve these aims, CSA introduced a number of changes that had been identified as requiring improvement, including an open exchange of COA application information between parents, introduction of national COA teams<sup>57</sup> and a phone-based application process pilot.<sup>58</sup>

**3.30** The COA Reforms project did not achieve its aim of simplified, efficient and more customer-focused application and review processes. Performance indicators specific to the COA process show minimal or negative change, including:

- an increase in the number of complaints to CSA and the Ombudsman about COA, between 2006–07 and 2008–09, in real terms by 271 to 435 and 182 to 231, respectively; and
- the time taken to finalise COA decisions has remained relatively steady with around 40 per cent finalised within 29 to 75 days and less than 10 per cent taking more than 75 days to finalise.

**3.31** Since the COA project the proportion of COA applications that resulted in a variation to a child support assessment amount has increased (from 46 per cent in 2005–06 to 50 per cent in 2008–09)<sup>59</sup>, indicating that there was an increase in the proportion of customers applying that had grounds for their assessment to be varied. While this result is an improvement, the high proportion of applications that do not result in a change indicates that the COA process could still be better communicated.

**3.32** Stakeholder consultations conducted by CSA in 2005 suggested that this could be achieved by better informing customers of valid reasons for assessments to be changed.<sup>60</sup> Better targeting would reduce unproductive

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<sup>56</sup> The COA process costs approximately \$22 million per year.

<sup>57</sup> These teams were subsequently disbanded (April 2009).

<sup>58</sup> The pilot was well-received by customers and staff but a CSA review indicated that a national rollout was cost-prohibitive.

<sup>59</sup> Outcome codes were not recorded for around 25 per cent of applications and were excluded from the analysis.

<sup>60</sup> Child Support Agency, *Consolidated Report of Feedback from Stakeholders in Relation to COA [Change of Assessment]*, 2005.

processing effort and customer dissatisfaction from filling in long, complex forms multiple times.

**3.33** In 2008, CSA initiated another COA Reform project with outcomes that reflect those of the initial COA project, including improving the quality and consistency of decision-making and simplifying the process. CSA plans to commence implementation of changes from early 2010 but relatively simple and useful changes, such as the introduction of an interactive, guided COA online form<sup>61</sup>, are not identified as improvements. In addition, the planned outputs do not address all COA issues that CSA has identified.<sup>62</sup> Given that four COA reviews have been undertaken since 2002 and problems with the process remain unresolved, CSA would benefit from a sustained and focused effort to implement identified improvements.

### **Increased Online Services project**

**3.34** CSAonline is a secure online service that enables customers and employers to view and update some information held by CSA, and send and receive messages to and from CSA. The CSAonline project was expected to expand the range of services available online to attract and retain customers to use the internet to interact with CSA. This was expected to deliver increased customer satisfaction and efficiencies for CSA, including workload management.

**3.35** At 30 September 2009, about 7.6 per cent of CSA's customers were CSAonline subscribers. Comparatively, this is a low level when compared with Centrelink, another service delivery agency within the Human Services portfolio.<sup>63</sup>

**3.36** At 30 September 2009, 17 847 CSAonline subscribers had inactive or deregistered accounts<sup>64</sup> (or 16 per cent of customers and employers that have

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<sup>61</sup> The Australian Government Online Service Point Program is an initiative managed by the Department of Finance and Deregulation that assists Australian Government departments and agencies to adopt SmartForms. SmartForms are Portable Document Format (PDF) forms converted from non-interactive documents to interactive, online documents. For more information, refer to <<http://smartforms.business.gov.au/developer/index.php>>.

<sup>62</sup> For example, no outputs are planned to address issues with the lack of segmentation of cases to streamline service delivery or inflexibility in the setting of COA conferences.

<sup>63</sup> 36.8 per cent of Centrelink customers were registered for self-service (telephone and online).

<sup>64</sup> Accounts can be made inactive at customers' request or by CSA if the registration process is not completed.

enrolled) and therefore were not using CSAonline, despite expressing sufficient interest in the online service to register. In reviewing CSAonline, the ANAO suggests that CSA identify barriers to, and incentives for, customer uptake; including the reason(s) for the high number of inactive or de-registered accounts. Other improvements CSA could consider include:

- testing potential functions to determine those that customers would find most useful and analysing telephone transactions to determine which are most common and could be offered online. The importance of such an approach is demonstrated by two functions provided through CSAonline which, at August 2009, had only been used once in over three years of operation<sup>65</sup>;
- addressing functionality and usability problems, such as the lack of conventional online log-in assistance<sup>66</sup>; and
- increasing the promotion of CSAonline and offering to subscribe customers when they register with CSA.

## Call Recording project

3.37 Prior to the BBCSA program, stakeholders were concerned with CSA's lack of accountability for the decisions it made<sup>67</sup>, and decision-making was the focus of numerous complaints to CSA and the Ombudsman. The introduction of call recording was intended to enable CSA to record all inbound and outbound customer calls, and consequently increase the transparency of information and advice provided by CSA to customers.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> These were notification of death and notification of marriage of child.

<sup>66</sup> Conventional log-in assistance includes prompting customers to answer security questions and generating an email with a forgotten password.

<sup>67</sup> Child Support Agency 2005, *Strategic Review*, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Appropriate inbound call types are not recorded by CSA, such as callers who are not customers (including legal practitioners, Ministerial office staff, Australian Federal Police officers, and people inquiring about recruitment) and customers whom staff require a security clearance to deal with (highly protected customers). Also, CSO calls to the ICT service desk, personnel and payroll officers and technical support officers are not recorded.

**3.38** The call recording project was not as effective as intended, however, because:

- CSA's call recording system does not capture all calls including calls made to and from RSCs; calls made after hours, change of assessment conference calls; calls made direct to CSOs' extension numbers; and calls to the Child Support Scheme Reforms information line in 200708 and 200809. Also, CSOs can choose not to have their outbound customer calls recorded; and
- despite CSA advising customers that its call recording functionality would be used for 'quality assurance and training purposes'<sup>69</sup>, recordings have not been used for training purposes since the functionality was introduced. CSA advised the ANAO that the capacity for Team Leaders to listen to recorded calls from their desks could be activated but it had not monitored use of this function.

**3.39** CSA introduced call recording to address customer and stakeholder concerns about its transparency and accountability. However, CSA does not record many of the calls it makes and receives and, from November 2008 to November 2009, CSA used the functionality to listen to only 5815 of the 2.1 million calls made to and from CSA.<sup>70</sup> This reduces CSA's ability to fully realise the benefits offered by its call recording system, for example, using calls for CSOs' training and development.

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<sup>69</sup> Child Support Agency, *Child Support Matters* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, May/June 2007, available from <[http://www.csa.gov.au/newsletter/pdf/CSA\\_Matters\\_may07.pdf](http://www.csa.gov.au/newsletter/pdf/CSA_Matters_may07.pdf)> [accessed 23 September 2009].

<sup>70</sup> Calls are retrieved by staff involved in complaints resolution, freedom of information, litigation, fraud, security, ICT, Social Security Appeals Tribunal, Ministerial correspondence and objections.

## Recommendation No.5

**3.40** Consistent with the objective of the call recording project in contributing to customer service improvement, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- investigate its capacity to, and where practicable, record all appropriate inbound and outbound customer calls to increase the accountability and transparency of interactions between CSA and customers; and
- use call recordings as a staff development tool, particularly by activating the call retrieval functionality for team leaders and technical support officers.

**3.41 DHS response:** Agree.

The vast majority of inbound and outbound customer calls are currently recorded by the CSA. Work is progressing to include inbound and outbound call types currently not recorded. Infrastructure enhancements are being made to allow recording of inbound and outbound customer calls from RSCs. Recording of 'change of assessment' telephone conference calls will be in place in 2010–11.

Team leaders are able to listen to calls in real time to assist staff during the call as well as for quality assurance and development purposes. Plans are currently being made to make call recording available to all team leaders for the purpose of resolving Step 2 complaints (escalated complaints referred by the customer service officer to the team leader for resolution) which will also further assist with staff development.

The use of call recording to support staff training and development was trialled during the Quality Assessment Framework pilot in 2009. The post pilot report made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the product and the process. These recommendations are currently being evaluated.

## IT Systems Architecture project

**3.42** CSA undertook an IT systems architecture review in 2006 to develop a future vision for CSA's information systems, technology and infrastructure, that aligned with CSA's goals and strategic direction. The review was expected to position CSA's IT architecture to, amongst other things:

- support the achievement of CSA's goals, objectives and business improvements; and
- provide fast, flexible and cost-effective changes in the future.

**3.43** The IT systems architecture review identified numerous shortcomings and made recommendations to overcome these limitations. In 2006, the CSA Executive agreed with many of the recommendations but not the implementation timeframes proposed.

**3.44** CSA's current IT architecture does not support parts of CSA's current customer management model, particularly case selection and management, or corporate reporting needs, such as the provision of outreach activities. It is also not supported by consistent system documentation. Many of the changes in the review agreed by CSA's Executive remain outstanding and the IT operating environment has also since changed.<sup>71</sup> CSA could improve system support for staff to help deliver better customer service by reviewing the relevance of the IT systems architecture review recommendations to the current environment; and prioritising and implementing changes as appropriate and where necessary resources are available.

## Key performance indicators

**3.45** As part of the BBCSA Evaluation Framework, CSA identified eight key performance indicators (KPI) related to customer service improvement. Table 3.2 shows the relationship between the customer service improvement projects and the KPIs. Following Table 3.2 is an analysis of the progress against each KPI. Where possible, the year preceding the commencement of the BBCSA program, 2005–06, is used as the benchmark year.

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<sup>71</sup> In particular, changes to CSA's IT operating environment have resulted from the disengagement from the Australian Taxation Office's network, the closer integration of CSA into DHS and the closure of the enterprise data warehouse project prior to completion.



**Table 3.2****BBCSA performance indicators related to the customer service improvement projects**

Project \ Indicator	Customer satisfaction rating	Improved perceptions of CSA	Multiple resolution attempts	External escalation rate	Customer complaints	More regular and reliable payments	Staff impact and readiness	Staff satisfaction
Team Size and Support Restructure	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Regional Service Centre	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Personalised Services	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Change of Assessment Reform	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Increased Online Services	✓	✓						
Call Recording	✓	✓						✓
IT System Architecture	✓							✓

Source: ANAO analysis.

**Customer satisfaction rating and improved perceptions of CSA**

**3.46** The BBCSA Evaluation Framework uses three measures to gauge customer satisfaction:

- Customers Having a Say (CHAS) - an ongoing, telephone-based survey of approximately 1000 customers per month that measures performance on the service just delivered to the customer as well as perceptions of CSA overall;
- Professionalism Index - an annual, telephone-based survey that assessed CSA customers' perceptions of the professionalism of CSA staff; and
- Child Support Scheme Reforms (CSSR) customer research - a periodic, telephone-based survey of around 600 customers and 400 members of

the general community that aimed to evaluate the reach and impact of the BBCSA Communication and Education project.<sup>72</sup>

**3.47** Overall, customer research showed an increase in customer satisfaction during the implementation of the BBCSA program. However, the CHAS survey is the only ongoing measure of customer satisfaction and, while the rating remains high, it has shown a decline since the BBCSA projects were transitioned to business-as-usual teams within CSA in December 2007. Since the start of the BBCSA program in June 2006:

- the CHAS overall customer satisfaction rating increased by three per cent in the first two years of the BBCSA program implementation (to 79 per cent) and declined under a revised CHAS<sup>73</sup> by five per cent in the year from September 2008 (to 71 per cent);
- there were no significant changes in the Professionalism Index or satisfaction ratings within the Index (in 2006 and 2007); and
- more paying and receiving parents agreed that CSA was significantly improving its service delivery to customers between May 2007 and August 2008 in the CSSR customer research (from an average of 57 per cent to an average of 77 per cent).<sup>74</sup>

**3.48** In 2009, DHS conducted a survey of customers' experiences with Human Services portfolio agencies. In comparison with other agencies, CSA had the highest proportion of customers that rated their satisfaction as 'below expectations' (25 per cent for CSA compared to a 12 per cent average satisfaction rate for Human Services agencies).<sup>75</sup>

## Multiple resolution attempts

**3.49** The multiple resolution attempts indicator counts the number of customers that try to resolve their issues through CSA's internal processes on more than two occasions within a twelve-week period. The internal processes

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<sup>72</sup> The Professionalism Index and Child Support Scheme Reforms customer research were discontinued in 2008. The Education and Communication project is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>73</sup> In August 2008, a revised CHAS was introduced that aligned with CSA's Customer Service Principles. The original CHAS aligned with the previous CSA Client Charter elements: respectful, objective, accurate, informed, prompt and resolving issues.

<sup>74</sup> Child Support Agency, *Child Support Scheme and BBCSA Reforms August 2008 Results*, 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Department of Human Services, *Customer Experience Survey*, 2009, p. 52.

included in this measure are: complaints to team leaders (step two)<sup>76</sup> and CSA's complaints team (step three), invalid objections<sup>77</sup> lodged against CSA decisions and change of assessment<sup>78</sup> applications that are refused prior to a conference<sup>79</sup> between the parents being held.

**3.50** Figure 3.1 shows that the number of customers who were directed through a number of CSA's internal processes without resolution of their core issues decreased by 22 per cent in the first year of the BBCSA program, increased by 11 per cent in the second year and remained steady in the following year. When compared with customer numbers during this period, there was minimal change (0.01 per cent) in the proportion of multiple resolution attempts per customer.

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<sup>76</sup> CSA operates a three-step complaints process. Step one is a complaint made direct to a CSO, step two is a complaint escalated from a CSO to a team leader and step three is a complaint made direct to CSA's complaints service.

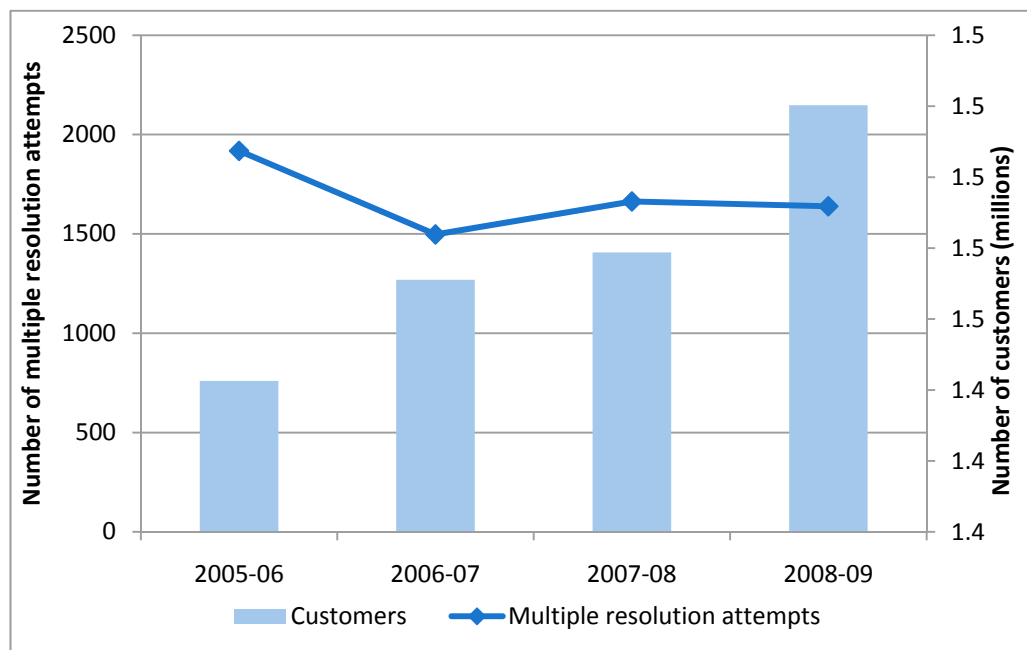
<sup>77</sup> An objection is invalid when it is not: lodged within 28 days of the day that the parent received notice of the decision from CSA; about a decision for which there is an objection right under the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988; in writing from a person aggrieved by the decision; or does not state fully and in detail the grounds relied upon. Source: Child Support Agency, *The Guide: 4.1.4: What is a valid objection?* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2009, available from <[http://www.csa.gov.au/guidev2/TheGuideMaster.aspx?content=4\\_1\\_4](http://www.csa.gov.au/guidev2/TheGuideMaster.aspx?content=4_1_4)> [accessed 6 October 2009].

<sup>78</sup> Sections 98C and 117 of the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*.

<sup>79</sup> CSA can decide to refuse to change the assessment without giving any parent a conference if: it has no power to make a change of assessment decision based on the child support legislation or if the parent's financial circumstances are complex; the application does not adhere to the legislated reasons for an assessment change; a prior application has been refused and there is no additional information; and the agency-initiated change of assessment requirements have not been satisfied. Source: Child Support Agency, *The Guide: 2.6.3: A decision to refuse change of assessment* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2008 available from <[http://www.csa.gov.au/guidev2/TheGuideMaster.aspx?content=2\\_6\\_3](http://www.csa.gov.au/guidev2/TheGuideMaster.aspx?content=2_6_3)> [accessed 6 October 2009].

**Figure 3.1**

**Multiple resolution attempts and customers, 2005–06 to 2008–09**

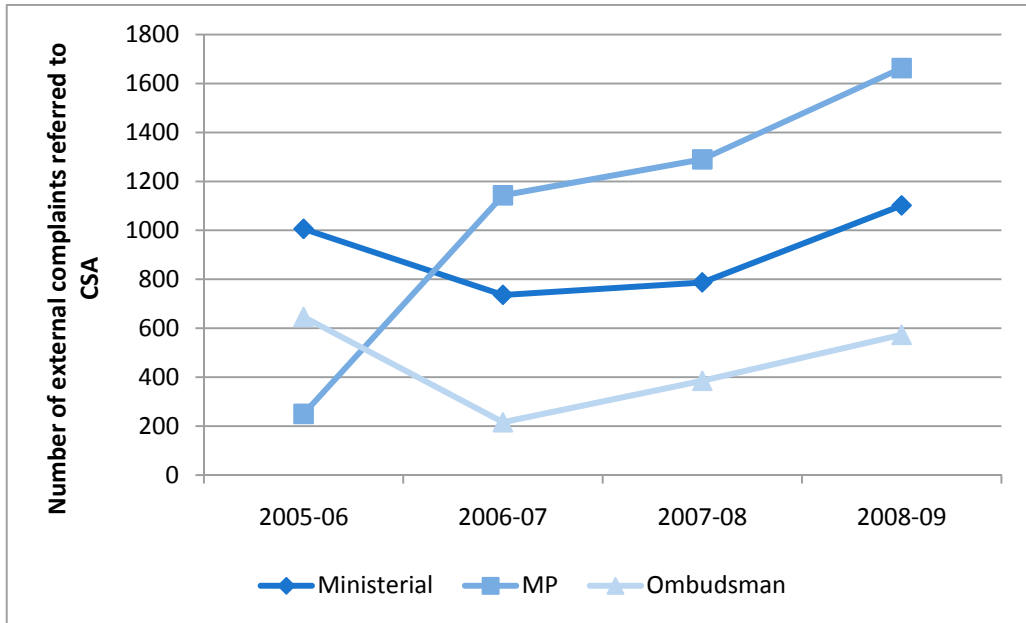


Source: ANAO analysis of information in Child Support Agency, *Multiple Resolution Attempts*, 2009.

### External escalation rate

**3.51** CSA aimed to reduce the number of complaints it received from Ministers, Members of Parliament, the Ombudsman, and the media on behalf of customers.<sup>80</sup> This is known as the external escalation rate and it indicates the number of customers who seek resolution of their issues outside of CSA. Figure 3.2 shows that in comparison with the benchmark year of 2005–06, complaints referred from Ministers and the Ombudsman to CSA declined in 2006–07 then increased in the following two years, while complaints to Members of Parliament increased each year across the period. The proportion of these complaints that were upheld when reviewed by the CSA complaints team also increased during this period from 19 per cent in 2005–06 to 28 per cent in 2008–09.

<sup>80</sup> CSA does not measure the number of complaints received from the media.

**Figure 3.2****External escalations referred to CSA, 2005–06 to 2008–09**

Source: ANAO analysis of information in Child Support Agency, *Number of Step 3 Complaints Received/Upheld*, 2009.

**3.52** Overall, the increase in external escalations (43 per cent) was considerably higher than the corresponding increase in total CSA cases (five per cent) between 2005–06 and 2008–09. While a proportion of CSA customers will automatically seek to raise their issues outside of the system, these results indicate that there remains scope for CSA to improve customer satisfaction with issue resolution. In this regard, CSA could take steps to measure customer satisfaction with its complaints management process and use responses to identify areas for improvement. Such action may prevent customers from escalating issues externally, allowing CSA to use its personalised services case management approach to pro-actively assist customers that have sought resolution of their child support issues through multiple CSA processes (refer paragraphs 3.21 to 3.22).

### *Complaints to the Ombudsman*

**3.53** On receipt of complaints, the Ombudsman can decline a complaint, investigate a complaint and/or produce a formal report, depending on the complexity and severity of the matter. The Ombudsman investigates complaints for a number of reasons including (but not limited to) the vulnerability of the complainant, whether the complainant has external review

options and if intervention by the Ombudsman is warranted based on consideration of the agencies' role, the relevant legislation and the circumstances of the complainant.<sup>81</sup>

**3.54** Between 2006–07 and 2008–09, the Ombudsman referred an average of 17.6 per cent of the complaints that it received annually to CSA for resolution.<sup>82</sup> Overall, the number of complaints referred increased from 1927 in 2005–06 to 2471 in 2008–09. At the same time, the number of complaints that the Ombudsman investigated increased from 1195 in 2006–07 to 1883 in 2008–09. The majority of these complaints related to administrative and policy matters including assessment, compensation, employment and privacy; rather than service delivery issues.

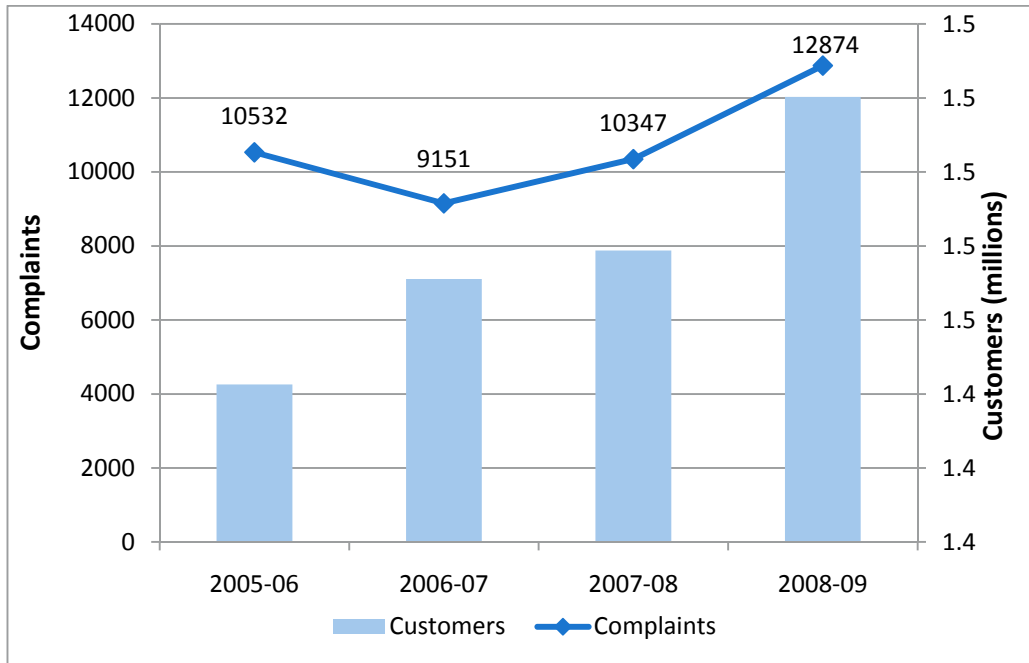
## Customer Complaints

**3.55** CSA is able to reliably report on complaints received directly by its complaints team but not by CSOs (step one) or team leaders (step two) because these complaints are not recorded in Cuba. CSA's complaints data therefore under-represents the total number of complaints received, and limits the amount of information CSA has available to address systematic customer grievances. Figure 3.3 shows that the number of complaints to CSA's complaints team decreased in the first year of the BBCSA program compared to the benchmark year and increased in the two successive years. These increases were in both actual terms and in the average number of complaints per CSA customer (proportional).

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<sup>81</sup> Advice from the Commonwealth Ombudsman, January 2010. The Ombudsman categorises the complaints it investigates into low complexity, medium complexity and formal report produced. The Ombudsman produces formal reports when 'the administrative action under investigation was unlawful, unreasonable, unjust, oppressive, improperly discriminatory, or otherwise wrong or unsupported by the facts; was not properly explained by an agency; or was based on a law that was unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory.' Source: Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Australian Federal Police and the Child Support Agency, Department of Human Services*, [Internet]. Commonwealth Ombudsman, Australia, 2009, available from <[http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/files/investigation\\_2009\\_14.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/files/investigation_2009_14.pdf)> [17 December 2009]. The Ombudsman produced four formal reports related to the Child Support Agency between 2006 and 2009.

<sup>82</sup> Child Support Agency, *Complaints Data 2008–09*, 2009; Commonwealth Ombudsman, *CSA approaches received by category financial years 2006–07 to 2008–09*, 2009.

**Figure 3.3****Customer complaints and customers, 2005–06 to 2008–09**

Source: ANAO analysis of information in Child Support Agency, *Step 3 complaints received*, 2009.

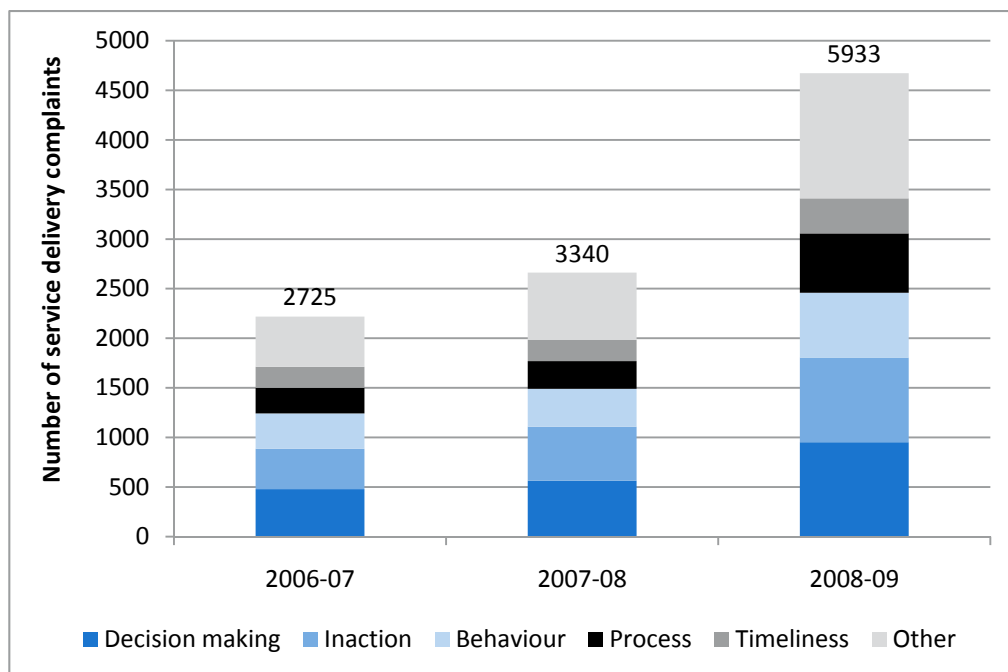
**3.56** In 2008–09, the largest number of complaints received by CSA were related to customer service delivery (4672, or 70.2 per cent).<sup>83</sup> This represents an increase of 52 per cent compared with the number of service delivery complaints received in 2006–07.

**3.57** Figure 3.4 shows the number of complaints for each issue that makes up the service delivery complaint category. Most service delivery complaints relate to CSA’s decision-making. However, CSA inaction was the largest contributor to the growth in service delivery complaints, with an increase of 37 per cent between 2006–07 and 2008–09.

<sup>83</sup> For the purposes of this report, the following issues were included in the policy category: amount disputed and affordability. These issues were included in the service delivery category: decision-making, inaction, behavior, timeliness, process. This distinction was made based on the service delivery areas to which CSA can directly apply influence.

**Figure 3.4**

**Top five service delivery complaint issues, 2006–07 to 2008–09**



Source: ANAO analysis of information in Child Support Agency, *Step 3 Complaints Received*, 2009.

**3.58** The increase in service delivery complaints could be driven by many factors including:

- increased contact between CSA and its customers related to the Child Support Scheme Reforms<sup>84</sup> (the number of letters sent to customers increased from 9.8 million to 16.7 million and phone calls received by CSA increased from 3.0 million to 3.3 million between 2005–06 and 2008–09);

<sup>84</sup> CSA attributed the increase in complaints in 2007–08 to this factor. Source: Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2007–08* [Internet] <<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/dhs/publications/annual-reports/0708/part3/performance/customer-service-excellence.htm>> [accessed 25 September 2009]. The Commonwealth Ombudsman attributed the increase in complaints that they received to 'the general increase in complaints to the office across the board, the CSA's preparatory work with its customers for the significant changes to the Child Support Scheme formula, discussed below, and an increased number of complaints claiming the CSA failed to collect child support.' Source: Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Annual Report 2007–08* [Internet]. Commonwealth Ombudsman, Australia, 2008, available from <[http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/publications\\_information/annual\\_reports/ar2007-08/Chapter\\_7/Chapter\\_7d.html](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/publications_information/annual_reports/ar2007-08/Chapter_7/Chapter_7d.html)> [accessed 9 October 2009].



- customers becoming more informed about the availability of CSA's complaint service (CSA promoted this service on its website, in some of its customer newsletters and the Employer Handbook);
- increased customer expectations of service delivery;
- failure to provide an effective remedy to earlier issues and complaints; and
- individual service delivery issues and systemic shortcomings that have not been remedied.

**3.59** CSA does not analyse the root causes of customer complaints and is therefore unable to determine the key driver(s) of complaints. CSA would benefit from undertaking an analysis of complaints data to better understand why customers complain so it can then address systematic issues that lead to customer dissatisfaction.

### **More regular and reliable payments**

**3.60** CSA's primary role is to collect and disburse child support payments. CSA uses the child support collection rate and the level of child support debt to measure performance against the 'more regular and reliable child support payments' key performance indicator.

**3.61** Figure 3.5 shows that the proportion of parents<sup>85</sup> that paid no child support increased slightly from 12.0 per cent in both 2005–06 and 2006–07, to 13.1 per cent in 2007–08, and decreased to 12.3 per cent in 2008–09. The proportion of parents that paid their full liability initially declined between 2005–06 and 2007–08 and increased slightly in the following year to pre-BBCSA program levels. Across this period less than 50 per cent of parents paid their full child support liability.

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<sup>85</sup> 'Parents' refers to Child Support Agency customers that transfer their child support payments through the Child Support Agency (CSA Collect) and have an active case. It excludes customers with nil child support liability.

**Figure 3.5**

**Proportion of child support liability paid, 2005–06 to 2008–09**



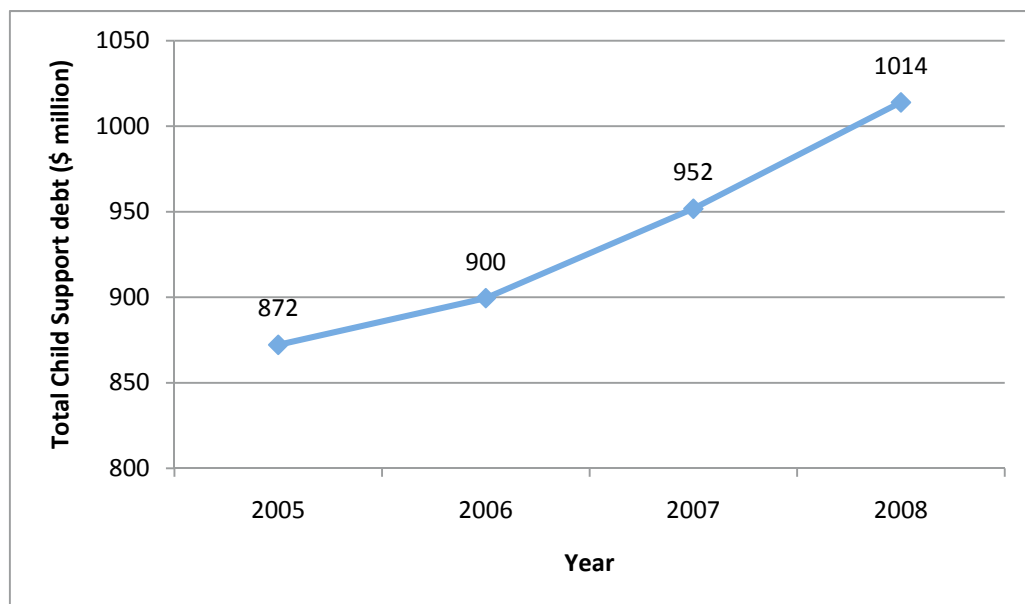
Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

**3.62** CSA anticipated that a proportion of paying customers would become non-compliant with their child support obligations between July 2006 and July 2008, in anticipation of revised child support assessments introduced in stage three of the CSSR. While a Transitional Compliance project was funded to address this risk as part of CSA's Improving Compliance program, compliance levels declined during this period.<sup>86</sup>

**3.63** The level of Total Child Support debt increased from \$872 million prior to the BBCSA program in 2005 to over \$1 billion in 2008 (refer Figure 3.6). The increase in child support debt can be attributed to a range of reasons, including an increase in the proportion of international cases with associated debt, and CSA's implementation of only one of five planned activities that formed part of the Transitional Compliance project.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> The ANAO conducted an audit of the implementation of the Improving Compliance program. See Australian National Audit Office, ANAO Audit Report No.19 2009–10, *Child Support Reforms: Stage One of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance*, Canberra, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

**Figure 3.6****Total child support debt, 2005 to 2008 (at 30 June)**

Source: ANAO analysis of information from Child Support Agency, *Child Support Scheme Facts and Figures 2006–07*, CSA, Canberra, 2007, p. 51 and Child Support Agency, *Collection Update Edition 9*, 2008.

**3.64** Customers may pay varying amounts of child support that are less than the amount required by their child support assessment. The increase in the child support payment rate indicates that a greater proportion of parents paid their full child support liability following the implementation of the BBCSA program. However, the high level of customers that pay less than, or none of, their liability (approximately 50 per cent of customers), and the increase in the total amount of child support debt to more than \$1 billion, indicates that seeking the appropriate balance between service delivery and compliance enforcement roles remains an ongoing challenge for CSA.

## Conclusion

**3.65** The customer service improvement projects aimed to deliver important enhancements including more accessible services and improved staff accountability. While most of CSA's customer service performance indicators showed an improvement during implementation of the BBCSA program, these improvements have largely not been sustained. This result cannot be solely attributed to the shortcomings of the customer service improvement projects. CSA and the Child Support Scheme have undergone significant change from

2006–07 and the results may also reflect customer dissatisfaction with child support policy, formula or compliance action.

**3.66** CSA implemented the customer service projects in a difficult operational environment, mainly due to the pressure generated from the simultaneous implementation of CSSR and the Improving Compliance program. There were some shortcomings in the implementation, monitoring and follow-up of projects and consequently, their impacts have differed. Common issues experienced that CSA could better address when implementing future projects include:

- aligning project activities or resources to achieve outcomes;
- defining project scopes and implementation plans that will deliver permanent benefit to customers and the organisation; and
- establishing clear project performance monitoring arrangements at the outset and taking remedial action based on performance assessment.

**3.67** CSA would benefit from taking action to realise the intended outcomes of the customer service improvement projects through ongoing monitoring of the customer impact and the implementation of further enhancements. CSA could also deliver improvements to customer service by using information collected through the personalised services and complaints management processes to identify and address systematic causes of customer dissatisfaction.

## 4. Organisational Change

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*This chapter examines the organisational change objective of the BBCSA program and the related projects.*

### Introduction

**4.1** As part of the BBCSA program, CSA received \$23 million over four years to effect organisational change through:

increasing proactive engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system.

**4.2** To assess CSA's progress in achieving organisational change, the ANAO reviewed the four organisational change projects undertaken by CSA, including their performance against the targets set by CSA. The ANAO also assessed CSA's performance against the relevant organisational change performance indicators contained in the BBCSA Evaluation Framework.

### Organisational change projects

**4.3** The Organisational Change program was designed to address community concerns that CSA was biased and unfair in its dealings with customers. The program was expected to lead to CSA's staff taking a more customer-focused approach to managing customers. To bring about this change, CSA planned to improve training and development for staff and review its processes to identify and remove systemic biases.

**4.4** CSA implemented three projects to help achieve its organisational change goals. The ANAO identified a fourth project, the Performance Management Framework project, which could also be expected to contribute to achieving the organisational change objective.<sup>88</sup> Table 4.1 provides an overview of these projects.

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<sup>88</sup> The need for a Performance Management Framework was identified in a review of CSA conducted in 2005, however, it was not included as part of the BBCSA program. CSA's Executive decided to fund its development from the BBCSA funding because it was considered an organisational priority (refer paragraphs 4.12 to 4.14).

**Table 4.1****Organisational Change projects**

Project	Outcomes and components
Customer First	The Customer First project aimed to provide CSA with direction and advice about moving towards a customer-focused culture; and define requirements for other projects and business-as-usual operations to assist with the shift in culture.
Levers of Change	The Levers of Change project aimed to develop a customer-focused culture by implementing approaches to address issues identified in CSA's culture survey and designing complementary leadership and support strategies.
Procedural Fairness	The Procedural Fairness project aimed to promote a customer-focused culture by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifying and removing systematic bias from CSA's processes and procedures; and</li> <li>improving customer, stakeholder and staff perceptions of CSA's procedural fairness.</li> </ul>
Performance Management Framework	The Performance Management Framework project aimed to develop a performance management framework that could produce reports that allowed tracking of CSA's performance measures.

Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

**Customer First project**

**4.5** The Customer First project was established to identify and develop the type of organisational culture required to improve customers' experiences in dealing with CSA. A change to CSA's existing culture was considered necessary for a number of reasons including ongoing criticism of CSA by stakeholders and customers, and large numbers of customer complaints to external bodies, such as the Ombudsman.

**4.6** The Customer First project consisted of two key activities involving every CSA staff member: a staff culture survey and a staff training program focusing on desired behaviours. Both the survey and training program were undertaken and were successful in identifying areas of CSA's culture that could be improved to help meet customers' expectations. However, the decline in customer satisfaction rating results (refer paragraphs 3.46 to 3.48) and the employee engagement rating (refer paragraph 4.37), indicate that actions to address the areas identified by the Customer First project have had a limited impact on delivering permanent organisational change.

## Levers of Change project

**4.7** The Levers of Change project was established to develop strategies to address the areas identified as requiring attention in the results of CSA's culture survey; and consequently, assist CSA to develop a culture supportive of a customer-focused approach and excellence in service delivery.

**4.8** The project's main activity consisted of workshops for staff about the results of CSA's culture survey, in particular explaining the types of behaviour that CSA needed to change and adopt to achieve its target culture. The effectiveness of the workshops and the success of the project in meeting its objective were limited due to the lack of follow-up action and more broadly:

- the planned activities did not adequately address the underlying causes of staff dissatisfaction and barriers to cultural change identified in the results of CSA's culture survey, such as process and procedure re-design, and leadership strategies and behaviours at the time;
- limited support and engagement from CSA's National Executive and Office for the customer-focus training, which was generally well received by frontline CSA staff; and
- the absence of a strategy to address other identified changes once CSA had greater organisational capacity to implement them.

## Procedural Fairness project

**4.9** The Procedural Fairness project was established to identify, remove and prevent CSA practices that create a perception of unfairness, and change the perception of customers, stakeholders and staff that CSA practices are unfair to certain parents.

**4.10** The project analysed information, such as customer correspondence, complaints and CHAS results, to identify common areas perceived by customers and stakeholders as biased and unfair. The project found that customers' and stakeholders' perceptions that some CSA decisions and processes were biased and unfair were justified in many instances. Twenty-six of the 30 perceived procedural fairness issues, identified in the analysis, were found to be unfair for some customers. In these instances, customers were treated unfairly due to CSA's processes and practices such as a reluctance to backdate decisions or recognise overpayments. The remaining four issues related to customers' perceptions that legislative issues were unfair. These issues were referred to the relevant parts of CSA for follow-up action.

**4.11** CSA would benefit from continuing to work with frontline staff, customers and stakeholders, to identify and remove unfair practices. This could also assist CSA to target its communication strategies as a means to improve customer and stakeholder understanding of the child support system.

### **Performance Management Framework project**

**4.12** An external review of CSA's organisational capability commissioned by the Minister for Human Services in 2005 recommended that it improve its performance management system.<sup>89</sup> From this review, CSA planned to introduce a new performance management framework system that aligned with its preferred behaviours and the intended outcomes of the Child Support Reforms. It was expected that this approach would assist CSA to change its culture by motivating staff to adopt CSA's preferred behaviours and also enable it to measure its cultural change progress.

**4.13** The new performance management framework was not introduced until May 2008, after the BBCSA program had been transitioned into CSA's business-as-usual operations. As a result of the timing, the new framework could not be used as part of the BBCSA program to reinforce the organisational culture and behaviours expected of staff. Further, while the performance management framework reflects the goals outlined in CSA's *2009–13 Strategic Plan*, it does not fully reflect the strategies specified for the achievement of these goals. For example, the framework does not include measures of the effectiveness of CSA's customer referral to community services or the development and implementation of Connecting Locally Plans.<sup>90</sup>

**4.14** To enable CSA to monitor its progress towards achieving goals and, where required, identify areas that need further development, CSA would benefit from better aligning the performance management framework with its organisational strategy. Such an alignment is also important in assisting to motivate CSA staff towards the achievement of organisational goals.

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<sup>89</sup> Child Support Agency, *Strategic Review*, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Connecting Locally Plans are developed by RSCs annually and outline the types of activities the RSCs plan to undertake to engage with customers and stakeholders; for example, mobile circuits and community information sessions.



## Key performance indicators

**4.15** As part of the BBCSA Evaluation Framework, CSA identified six KPIs related to organisational change. Table 4.2 shows the relationship between the organisational change projects and the KPIs. Following Table 4.2 is an analysis of the progress against each KPI. Where possible, the year preceding the commencement of the BBCSA program, 2005–06, is used as the benchmark year.

**Table 4.2**

### BBCSA performance indicators affected by Organisational Change projects

Indicator Project	Customer satisfaction rating*	Staff capability rating	Fair decisions	Customer procedural fairness indicator	Upheld review rate	Employee engagement rating
Customer First	✓	✓				✓
Procedural Fairness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Levers of Change	✓					✓
Performance Management Framework	✓	✓				✓

Source: ANAO analysis.

\* This is also a key performance indicator for the customer service improvement objective and is discussed in Chapter 3.

### Staff capability rating

**4.16** The staff capability rating indicator was expected to measure staff technical capability and relationship management. However, measures to inform this indicator had not been identified or developed for the final BBCSA evaluation report completed in January 2009.

**4.17** In the absence of any measures determined by CSA, the ANAO identified a number of relevant measures, including:

- customer responses to the CHAS<sup>91</sup> survey questions about CSA staff capability;
- CSA's customer research undertaken to measure the impact of implementation of the CSSR; and
- CSA's employee engagement survey results.

*CHAS survey responses about staff capability*

**4.18** Customers were asked about their perceptions of the accuracy of information provided and recorded by CSOs in the CHAS. Using customers' answers to these and other questions<sup>92</sup>, the CHAS results provided a rating of CSA's accuracy. Figure 4.1 shows that from 2005–06 to 2007–08 the proportion of customers that were satisfied with CSA's accuracy was high and remained relatively stable.

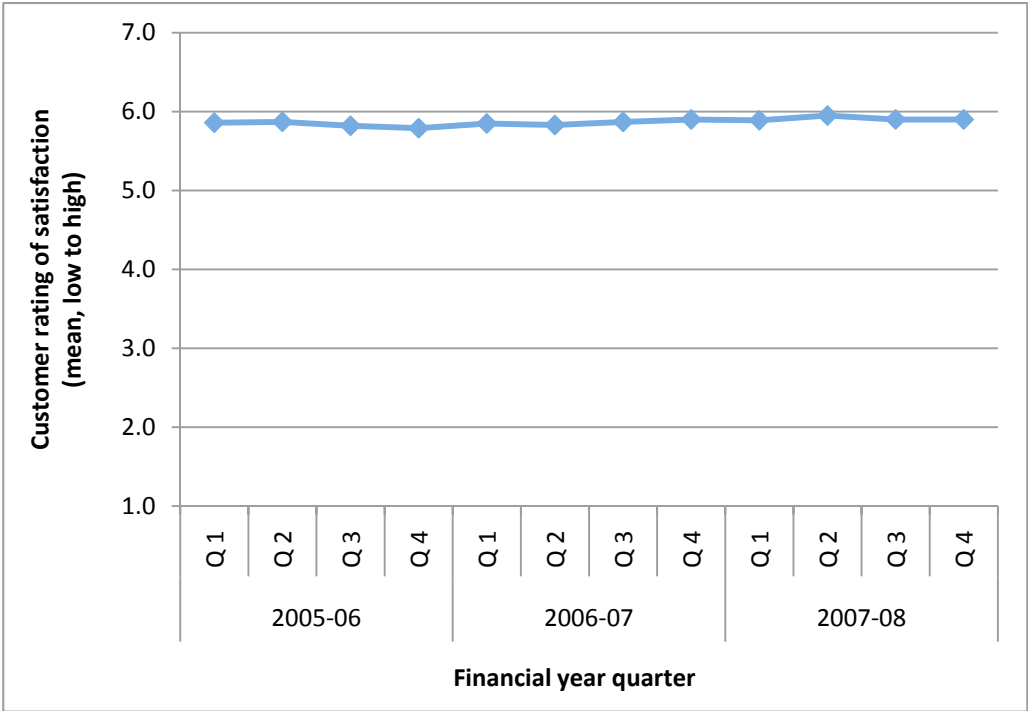
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<sup>91</sup> See paragraph 3.46 for information about CSA's CHAS survey.

<sup>92</sup> The other two questions that contribute to this rating are, 'I believe that the information I provided was accurately recorded by the Client Service Officer' and 'I understood what the Client Service Officer was saying.'

Figure 4.1

Customers’ mean scores of CSA’s accuracy, 2005–06 to 2007–08



Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

Note: The CHAS survey uses a seven-point scale; ratings of one to three represent dissatisfied customers, a rating of four represents a customer that is ambivalent and ratings of five to seven represent satisfied customers.

**4.19** The new CHAS survey asks, ‘The CSO had the knowledge and technical ability to help me’. The percentage of customers who provided a satisfied response to this question has remained high and relatively steady. Between February and December 2009, survey results ranged between 78 per cent and 82 per cent.

*CSSR customer research*

**4.20** CSA’s customer research survey that was used to determine the impact of the CSSR showed that from February 2008 to August 2008 customers’ satisfaction with the consistency of information and advice provided by CSOs improved. The results of this survey showed that customers’ dissatisfaction levels fell during this period and generally, satisfaction levels increased. For example, between May 2007 and August 2008, there was an increase of approximately 20 per cent among paying and receiving parents that agreed CSA was significantly improving its service delivery. CSA does not have in

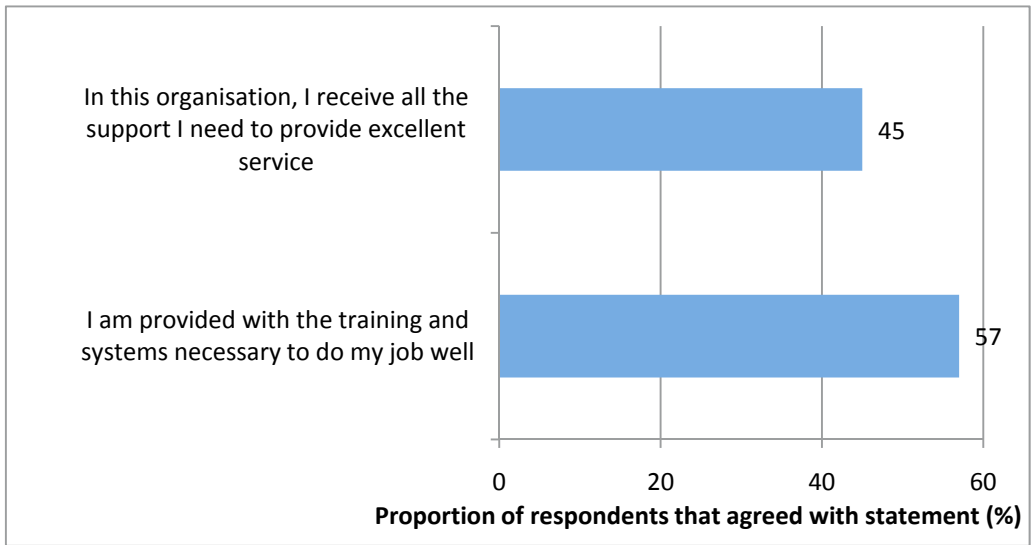
place an ongoing measure of customers’ perceptions or satisfaction of the consistency of information and advice provided by CSOs.

*Employee engagement survey results*

**4.21** Figure 4.2 shows that while most CSA staff who responded to CSA’s 2009 employee engagement survey believe that they are providing friendly and flexible service, less than half of the respondents felt that they were adequately supported to provide excellent service. Also, only 57 per cent of respondents felt that they were provided with the training and systems necessary to do their job well.

**Figure 4.2**

**CSA staff responses to service delivery questions**



Source: Child Support Agency, *CSA Employee Engagement Survey*, 2009.

**4.22** The BBCSA program identified staff capability as a critical issue to address in order to improve the quality of services provided to customers. The results of indicators identified by the ANAO show that the majority of customers have responded positively when asked about CSOs’ capability. Responses from CSOs also indicate that CSA could improve its support (including training and systems) for CSOs. The BBCSA Evaluation Framework would have benefited from the identification of information sources to assess the staff capability indicator.

## **Fair decisions indicator**

**4.23** The fair decisions indicator was intended to reflect the adequacy of CSA's internal quality assurance processes that could be measured by a reduction in the proportion of decisions that are challenged and reversed.

**4.24** Development of a fairness indicator was an expected output of the Procedural Fairness project, however it has not been developed (refer paragraphs 4.9 to 4.14). Further, the 2009 BBCSA Evaluation Framework Outcomes report does not provide a performance measure or assessment of this area. CSA did conduct a trial of a measure for fair decisions in 2008, however, despite a recommendation that a measure be continued, no further action was taken.

**4.25** The development of a fair decision performance indicator could have assisted CSA to assess the effectiveness of CSA's procedural fairness project. The lack of a measure to inform the fair decision indicator restricts CSA's capacity to identify and implement internal process and customer service enhancements in this area.

## **Customer procedural fairness indicator**

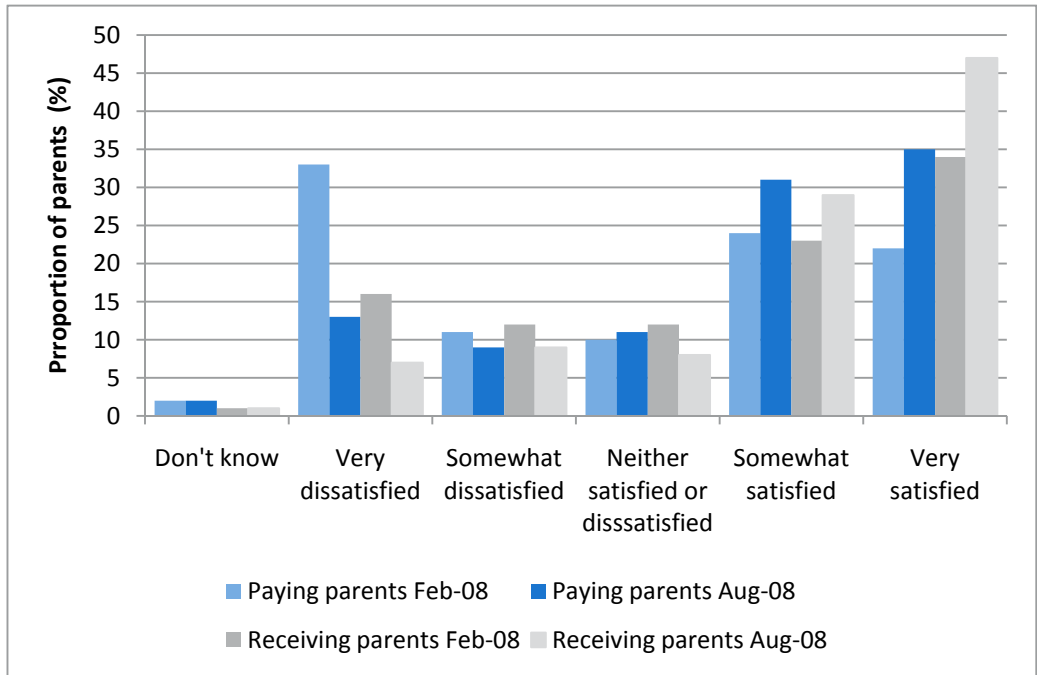
**4.26** The customer procedural fairness indicator was aimed to assess stakeholders', customers' and staff perceptions of the fairness of CSA services. The sources identified by CSA to inform this indicator were CSA's CSSR customer research and the CHAS survey.

### ***CSSR customer research***

**4.27** As part of its CSSR customer research in February and August 2008, CSA asked customers, with whom it had a recent interaction, if they were satisfied that CSA had handled their child support matter fairly. Figure 4.3 shows that customer perceptions of CSA's fairness in handling child support matters improved from February to August 2008. However, as this research was discontinued in August 2008, there is no ongoing measure of fairness and CSA is unable to determine if there has been a permanent improvement in this area.

**Figure 4.3**

**Satisfaction of receiving and paying parents that child support matter was handled fairly**

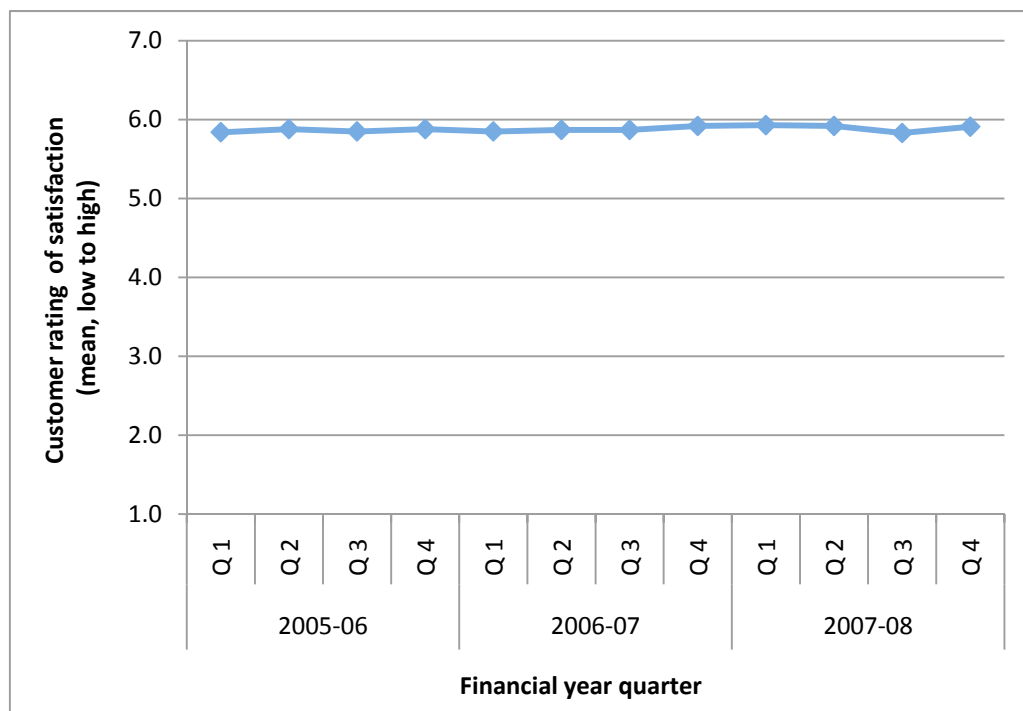


Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

**CHAS survey**

**4.28** CSA's previous version of the CHAS survey asked customers if they felt they had been treated fairly. Customers' responses to this question were combined with their responses to two other questions<sup>93</sup>, to determine an overall rating for CSA's objectivity in managing customers and their issues. Figure 4.4 shows that from 2005–06 to 2007–08 customers' mean scores for CSA's objectivity remained at a high and relatively stable level.

<sup>93</sup> The two other questions were: 'I felt that the CSO believed what I was saying' and 'I believe that the decision made by the CSA was based on the facts presented to them'.

**Figure 4.4****Customers' mean scores of CSA's objectivity, 2005–06 to 2007–08**

Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

Note: The CHAS survey uses a seven-point scale; ratings of one to three represent dissatisfied customers, a rating of four represents a customer that is ambivalent and ratings of five to seven represent satisfied customers.

**4.29** In the revised version of the CHAS survey, customers are not asked if they believe they were treated fairly by CSA and objectivity is not reported. The closest comparable category to objectivity is the customer service principle, 'We work with the individual circumstances of both parents,' which is determined using the scores of customers' responses to three questions.<sup>94</sup> Overall customer satisfaction with this category is just over 60 per cent and has remained steady from February to December 2009.

**4.30** The revised CHAS results also include customer satisfaction with a question to customers, 'I believe the Child Support System is fair'. This measure is reported bi-annually. A comparison of the two reports produced

<sup>94</sup> These questions are: 'The CSO listened to me'; 'I believe that the decision made by the CSA was based on all relevant information presented to them'; and 'I felt like I was treated as someone with individual needs'.

since the introduction of the revised CHAS survey shows that during the calendar year 2009, there was an increase from 38 per cent to 46 per cent of customers that expressed dissatisfaction with this statement. The relatively high levels of customer dissatisfaction with the fairness of the Child Support Scheme indicate that this is an area requiring improved understanding and attention by CSA.

**4.31** The BBCSA Evaluation Framework does not identify a source for staff or stakeholder perceptions of procedural fairness. The ANAO identified the employee engagement survey as a potential source of staff perceptions. Results of the 2009 employee engagement survey show that of the 2681 respondents (81 per cent of CSA's workforce), 59 per cent agreed that CSA had procedures and systems to provide objectivity in decision-making.

**4.32** In relation to stakeholders' perceptions, CSA conducts a stakeholder engagement survey that could provide an opportunity to seek feedback about the perceived fairness of its processes.

## **Upheld review rate**

**4.33** CSA customers can seek reviews of decisions and services through multiple avenues. Customers can make an objection by requesting CSA to formally review a decision. If the customer does not agree with the objection review decision, they may be able to appeal to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT), the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or a court. If customers are not satisfied with the service CSA has provided they can make a complaint.

**4.34** The upheld review rate is designed to measure the fairness and accuracy of CSA's decision-making. The BBCSA Evaluation Framework specifies the upheld rates of objections<sup>95</sup>, SSAT appeals<sup>96</sup>, and complaints as the information sources for this indicator.

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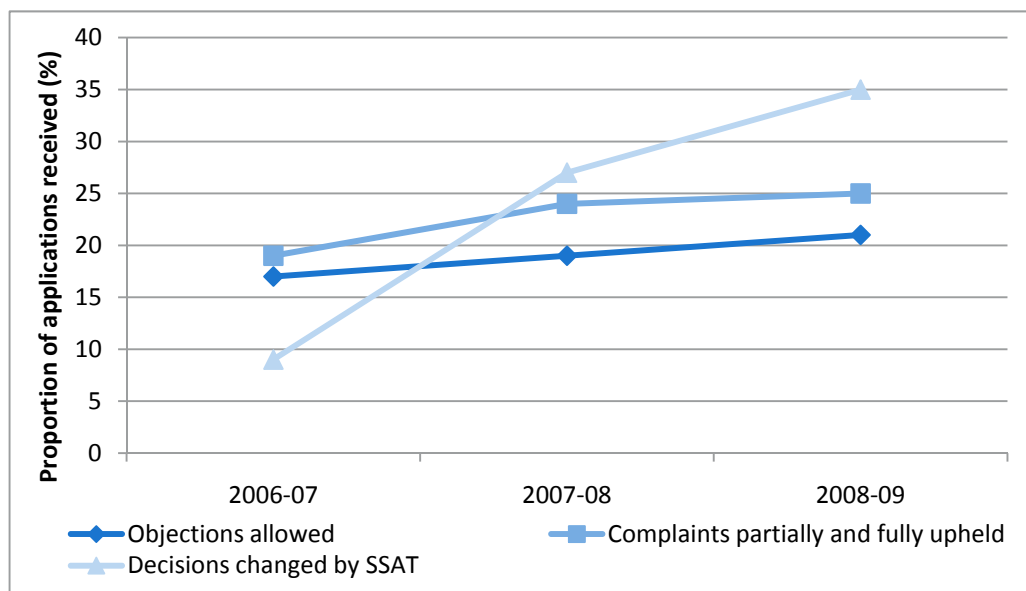
<sup>95</sup> Customers can lodge an objection to most CSA decisions. An objection is a request for CSA to review a decision. Customers cannot object to decisions made about parentage, some compliance enforcement action and use of Departure Prohibition Orders (issued to prevent customers with child support debts from leaving Australia). Customers are required to post or email their objection no longer than 28 days after receiving CSA's decision. Source: Child Support Agency, *Your rights following CSA decisions* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2009, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/publications/1313.aspx>> [accessed 29 September 2009].



**4.35** Figure 4.5 shows that the proportion of upheld, allowed and changed decisions among customer objection, SSAT reviews, and complaints have all increased.

**Figure 4.5**

**Proportion of SSAT, complaints and objections decisions changed, upheld and allowed**



Source: ANAO analysis of CSA and Social Security Appeals Tribunal information.

Note: The complaints information relates to stage three complaints only. The role of the SSAT as an independent reviewer of CSA decisions was introduced in January 2007.

**4.36** The BBCSA Evaluation Framework states that the upheld review rate performance indicator reflects ‘the extent to which CSA makes decisions that are fair and accurate.’<sup>97</sup> However, decisions may be changed not only because they are incorrect but also for other reasons such as more information becoming available. In 2008–09, for example, almost 60 per cent of CSA decisions changed by the SSAT were due to new financial, medical or other

<sup>96</sup> As part of implementation of Stage Two of the Child Support Scheme Reforms in January 2007, the Social Security Appeals Tribunal appeals mechanism was introduced. The SSAT can affirm, vary, substitute or refer back to CSA most CSA objection decisions. The SSAT cannot review decisions made prior to January 2007 or change of assessment objections that CSA has referred to the Courts. Source: Child Support Agency, *Your rights following CSA decisions* [Internet]. CSA, Australia, 2009, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/publications/1313.aspx>> [accessed 29 September 2009].

<sup>97</sup> Child Support Agency, *BBCSA Outcomes Report*, 2008, p. 13.

information becoming available.<sup>98</sup> These results demonstrate the importance of CSA analysing the reasons for decisions being changed and then taking appropriate action, where possible, to address them.

## Employee engagement rating

**4.37** Figure 4.6 shows the results from CSA's employee engagement surveys. Between 2007 and 2009, despite having a negative score, leadership was the only area that improved in the results of the employee engagement survey, with results for all other areas declining. Some of these areas, such as influence<sup>99</sup> and alignment<sup>100</sup>, were identified from CSA's culture survey as requiring attention. As the lowest scoring areas in the survey, the report on the survey results<sup>101</sup> specified leadership, influence and employer as priorities to be addressed.

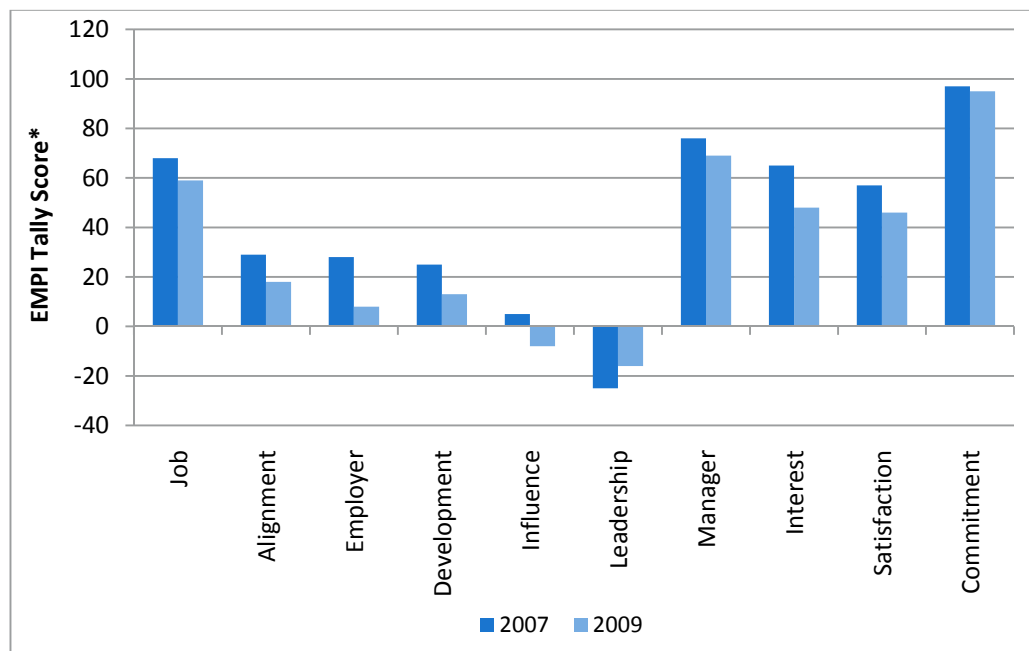
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<sup>98</sup> 31.5 per cent of decisions changed were because of CSA errors in applying law or fact and 10.2 per cent were changed by agreement between the parties involved. Social Security Appeals Tribunal, *Annual Report 2008–09* [Internet]. SSAT, Australia, 2009, available from <[http://www.ssat.gov.au/iNet/ssat.nsf/1a2f57b7c6453c8fca256cb6001c5def/68d85846ae10d7a5ca25765e001fc2c2/\\$FILE/SSAT%20AR%202008-09.pdf](http://www.ssat.gov.au/iNet/ssat.nsf/1a2f57b7c6453c8fca256cb6001c5def/68d85846ae10d7a5ca25765e001fc2c2/$FILE/SSAT%20AR%202008-09.pdf)> [accessed 14 December 2009], p. 26.

<sup>99</sup> Reflects if the workplace encourages employee input, respects staff and has a planned and organised workflow.

<sup>100</sup> Reflects if staff understand the organisation direction, are empowered, encouraged to contribute and show initiative.

<sup>101</sup> Department of Human Services, *Child Support Program – Employee Engagement Survey 2009*, 2009.

**Figure 4.6****Comparison of results of 2007 and 2009 employee engagement survey**

Source: Child Support Agency, *CSA Employee Engagement Survey*, 2009.

\* The Employee Motivation & Performance Index (EMPI) is a sliding scale that measures engagement and disengagement of employees. The scale ranges from -200 to +200 with a negative score indicating a level of dissatisfaction.

## Conclusion

**4.38** The Organisational Change program was considered necessary to develop a customer focus in CSA and address perceptions of systematic bias. While the projects provided valuable insights into areas requiring change, the short life of the projects, insufficient identification of appropriate performance indicators and limited ongoing performance monitoring have impacted on CSA's ability to assess the effectiveness of the program.

**4.39** The focus of the program was limited in that the key elements consisted of a training program, identification and referral of systematic biases, and investigation and dissemination of cultural survey results. To bring about cultural change, CSA would have benefited from continuing and expanding projects to address areas identified for improvement, such as leadership engagement and process and procedure re-design.

**4.40** There are gaps in the performance monitoring information, including measures which were non-ongoing or undeveloped. Those measures that have been ongoing have either remained stable (sometimes at relatively high levels) or are declining. Notably, the decline in customer service indicators (discussed in Chapter 3) reflects that CSA has not been as successful as envisaged in achieving a customer-focused organisation.

**4.41** Following the finalisation of the BBCSA program in July 2008, CSA commenced a new service delivery improvement program. This program could help improve customer, stakeholder and staff satisfaction levels as the program aims to improve the consistency and quality of CSA's services by:

- managing service delivery workloads more effectively;
- indentifying and applying best practice;
- improving services in a cost-effective manner; and
- allocating resources efficiently and effectively.

**4.42** It is important that CSA effectively monitors the impact of this program to measure improvement in this area and identify further changes that may be required. This is particularly relevant to employee satisfaction as CSA's 2009 employee engagement survey results show that while staff are committed, they remain dissatisfied with many organisational areas measured. Addressing causes of staff dissatisfaction is likely to have a positive influence on culture and consequently, customer and stakeholder satisfaction.

## 5. Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

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*This Chapter examines the improved communication and stakeholder engagement objective of the BBCSA program and the related projects.*

### Introduction

**5.1** As part of the BBCSA program, CSA received \$22 million over four years to improve communication and stakeholder engagement by:

increasing proactive engagement with parents and stakeholders to provide a better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and options under the child support system, and the role of CSA within the family law system.

**5.2** To assess CSA's progress in improving communication and stakeholder engagement organisational change, the ANAO reviewed the four projects undertaken by CSA, including their performance against the targets set by CSA. The ANAO also assessed CSA's performance against the relevant communication and stakeholder engagement performance indicators contained in the BBCSA Evaluation Framework.

### Communication and stakeholder engagement projects

**5.3** Some CSA customers and stakeholders do not fully understand CSA's role in the family law system. This can result in customer or stakeholder complaints to CSA regarding policy issues<sup>102</sup> that are unrelated to its service role. This also has flow-on effects such as public criticism from parents and stakeholders about their lack of understanding of the service options provided by CSA and their child support rights and responsibilities.

**5.4** To address this issue CSA identified four projects aimed at improving stakeholders' and customers' understanding of CSA and the Child Support Scheme. Table 5.1 provides a brief description of the four projects.

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<sup>102</sup> The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is the department responsible for child support policy.

**Table 5.1****Communication and stakeholder engagement projects**

Project	Outcomes and components
Education and Communication	<p>The Education and Communication project aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve customers' and stakeholders' understanding of their child support rights, responsibilities and options; and</li> <li>educate customers and stakeholders about CSA's role in the family law system.</li> </ul> <p>The project was expected to achieve these outcomes by establishing an ongoing customer education and communication strategy that provided parents with information about their child support options.</p>
Conference Participation	The Conference Participation project aimed to improve customers' and stakeholders' perceptions of CSA, expand CSA's relationships with stakeholders and educate the community on CSA's role in the family law system.
CSA Products	The CSA Products project aimed to improve customers' experience with CSA by increasing product penetration and availability.
Letters and Forms	The Letters and Forms project aimed to address customer feedback on CSA's letters, forms and brochures that they were difficult to understand.

Source: ANAO analysis of CSA information.

**Education and Communication project**

**5.5** The Education and Communication project was introduced to improve customers' and stakeholders' understanding of options available under the Child Support Scheme and to enhance their awareness of the role of CSA in the family law system. The key performance indicator, 'aware and knowledgeable parents', showed an improvement during implementation of the BBCSA program. However, there are no ongoing sources of information to inform this measure so CSA is unable to assess whether this improvement has been sustained (refer paragraphs 5.20 to 5.23).

**5.6** Two of the key activities under the project that assisted CSA to achieve its intended result were the:

- creation of the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group in which stakeholders have the opportunity to raise child support matters with CSA and provide input to CSA publications; and
- implementation of a pro-active media strategy that involved assisting the media to prepare stories about child support and responding to media reports that CSA considered inaccurate.

## **Conference Participation project**

**5.7** CSA was funded to sponsor and attend stakeholder events in order to: promote CSA's role within the family law system; develop and improve new and existing stakeholder relationships; generate positive media coverage; and increase the distribution of CSA information products.

**5.8** The conferences project team planned to report on these activities through a quarterly brief to the Minister and regular emails to the CSA Executive, however, consistent and standardised reporting on the outcomes of the activities did not take place. Accordingly, in the absence of targets and reporting, CSA has not determined the impact of increased conference participation on its relationship with stakeholders.

## **CSA Products**

**5.9** Stakeholders recognised the value of CSA's products to customers and requested broader distribution of the support materials. CSA was funded to increase the distribution of its information products, such as self-help booklets that discuss issues related to family separation, to customers and stakeholders.

**5.10** Customer and community awareness of CSA products increased significantly during implementation of BBCSA. At August 2008, around 60 per cent of receiving parents and 50 per cent of paying parents were aware of CSA products and services in English and other languages. CSA could build on its success in improving customer awareness of products and services available, including through low-cost channels, such as community service providers and email notification.

## **Letters and Forms project**

**5.11** The Letters and Forms project was established to address customer concerns in relation to CSA's letters and forms, including clarity of information, consistency of message, and volume. The project was intended to revise individual letters and forms to make them easier for customers to understand and reduce the volume of letters sent to customers. In turn, this was expected to reduce the additional workload for staff associated with explaining CSA's correspondence to customers and also improve customer satisfaction.

**5.12** CSA reviewed and, where necessary revised, all of its letters and forms. However, impacting on the success of this action was the decision to undertake limited customer testing of the revised letters and forms.<sup>103</sup>

**5.13** Issues with CSA's letters and forms persist as demonstrated by the CHAS results for July to December 2009, which reflect that of all the aspects of CSA's service, customers are most dissatisfied with how easy letters are to understand.<sup>104</sup> Supporting this result was the 2008–09 Ombudsman's Annual Report which identified 'confusing CSA letters' as an issue that CSA has agreed to address.

**5.14** The Letters and Forms project also aimed to improve the appropriateness of the timing of letters. The success of the project in this area has been limited as reflected by the 2008–09 Ombudsman's Annual Report which was critical of CSA sending multiple notices to people covering different time periods without sufficient explanation of the differences between letters.<sup>105</sup>

**5.15** With regard to letter volumes, CSA has taken steps to increase the number of letters it sends electronically rather than in hard copy. The total number of standard letters (unrelated to the Child Support Scheme Reforms) sent to individual customers, however, has remained steady at approximately 11 letters per customer between 2005–06 and 2008–09.

**5.16** The ANAO's audit of *Forms for Service Delivery* in 2005–06 included CSA and suggested CSA could 'improve research into clients' communications needs and preferences, and strengthen analysis of customers' form completion patterns to identify common areas of difficulty'.<sup>106</sup> This suggestion remains applicable to CSA's management of its letters and forms.

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<sup>103</sup> The Notice of Assessment was the only letter tested with customers because CSA used it to notify parents of their new child support assessments for stage three of the Child Support Scheme Reforms.

<sup>104</sup> Child Support Agency, *Customers Having a Say*, DHS, Canberra, 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Annual Report 2008–09* [Internet]. Commonwealth Ombudsman, Australia, 2009, available from <[http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/pages/publications-and-media/reports/annual/ar 2008-09/download/PDF/annual\\_report\\_2008\\_09.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/pages/publications-and-media/reports/annual/ar%2008-09/download/PDF/annual_report_2008_09.pdf)> [accessed 28 October 2009], p. 71.

<sup>106</sup> ANAO Audit Report No. 26 2005–06, *Forms for Individual Services Delivery*, p. 17.



## Recommendation No.6

**5.17** To improve CSA's engagement with customers through letters and forms, the ANAO recommends that CSA:

- analyse form completion patterns and address customer dissatisfaction with communication products, particularly the clarity of customer letters; and
- continue to examine options to reduce letter volumes including where multiple letters are sent to customers.

**5.18 DHS response:** Agree.

Following the conclusion of the work conducted as part of BBCSA, the work of the Letters and Forms project was transitioned into business as usual, with a small team formed in June 2009. The team is responsible for managing the ongoing development, production, implementation, review and maintenance of the CSA's system and non-system generated letters and forms to ensure these products are up-to-date, meet CSA and customer needs as well as Departmental and Ministerial standards.

The Delivering Quality Outcomes review made a number of recommendations concerning improvements to CSA's communications with customers. These recommendations are currently being implemented and will support the continuous improvement of customer communications.

## Key performance indicators

**5.19** As part of the BBCSA Evaluation Framework, CSA identified five KPIs related to improving communication and stakeholder engagement. Table 5.2 shows the relationship between the communication and stakeholder engagement projects and the KPIs. Following Table 5.2 is an analysis of the progress against each KPI. Where possible, the year preceding the commencement of the BBCSA program, 2005–06, is used as the benchmark year.

**Table 5.2****BBCSA performance indicators related to communication and stakeholder engagement projects**

Indicator Project	Aware and knowledgeable parents	Aware and knowledgeable stakeholders	Engaged stakeholders	Useful information products	Improved perceptions of CSA
Education and Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conference Participation		✓	✓		✓
CSA Products				✓	
Letters and Forms	✓	✓			✓

Source: ANAO analysis.

**Aware and knowledgeable parents and stakeholders**

**5.20** CSA undertook customer research as part of the CSSR to assess the awareness and knowledge of CSA, its role, and the service options it provides. This research involved a periodic, telephone-based survey of CSA customers and community members.

**5.21** An increasing proportion of customers were able to correctly identify ten changes within CSA and the Child Support Scheme between May 2007 and August 2008.<sup>107</sup>

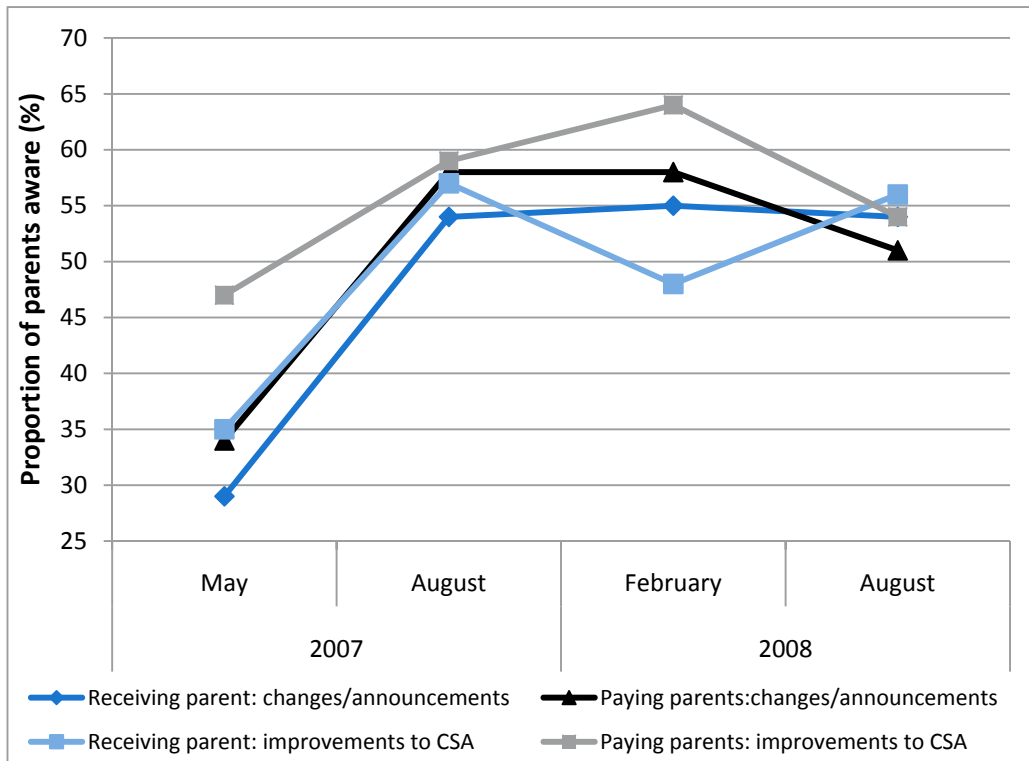
**5.22** Figure 5.1 shows that general awareness of recent improvements to CSA increased from 35 per cent to 56 per cent for receiving parents and from 47 per cent to 54 per cent for paying parents during this period. Also, general awareness of improvements to CSA increased from 29 per cent to 54 per cent for receiving parents and 34 per cent to 51 per cent for paying parents. Customers were most aware of information that affected child support liabilities, including that child support assessments can affect family assistance

<sup>107</sup> Child Support Agency, *Child Support Scheme and BBCSA Reforms August 2008 Results*, 2008.

payments or Family Tax Benefit payments, and were less aware of changes to CSA and its service delivery.<sup>108</sup>

**Figure 5.1**

**Customer awareness of changes, announcements and improvements**



Source: Child Support Agency, 2008, *Child Support Scheme and BBCSA Reforms August 2008 Results*, DHS, Canberra.

**5.23** Despite subsequent changes to child support, such as the introduction of new payment options, CSA has not continued to monitor customer awareness of changes. Ensuring that customers are aware of changes to the Child Support Scheme and the service options available is an important aspect of effective service delivery. CSA would benefit by continuing to monitor customer awareness of enhancements and service options to identify areas for

<sup>108</sup> Customers were least aware that 'CSA had employed more staff and trained them to improve service to customers' and was 'offering face to face services for customers'. CSA offered face to face services for customers prior to BBCSA. Source: Child Support Agency, *Child Support Scheme and BBCSA Reforms August 2008 Results*, 2008.

improvement and better target its communications to customers and stakeholders.

## Engaged stakeholders

**5.24** CSA identifies its priority stakeholders as advocacy and customer representative groups, legal practitioner groups, service providers and peak bodies, family research institutes, review bodies and government agencies. These stakeholders are represented on national and state Child Support Stakeholder Engagement Groups.

**5.25** CSA conducted annual stakeholder surveys in 2008 and 2009 to assess:

- the extent to which stakeholders feel that the CSA is actively engaging them and providing them with opportunities to enhance support provided to families;
- the effectiveness of the child support stakeholder engagement group meetings; and
- whether CSA can do more to build awareness and knowledge of the Child Support Scheme and services provided by CSA.<sup>109</sup>

**5.26** Based on the results of these surveys, a large proportion of stakeholders reported that they were satisfied with CSA's engagement efforts (85 per cent in 2008 and 81 per cent in 2009). Stakeholders reported high levels of agreement with statements about CSA's engagement, particularly that 'CSA is committed to supporting separated families by developing strong relationships with stakeholders' (77 per cent in 2008 and 80 per cent in 2009) and 'my engagement with CSA assists my organisation to support separating and separated families' (95 per cent and 81 per cent, respectively).

**5.27** Stakeholder satisfaction with other aspects of engagement declined, with the lowest rated aspect, 'CSA acts on feedback and addresses issues raised by stakeholders', declining from 59 per cent agreement in 2008 to 48 per cent in 2009.

**5.28** The methodology used to analyse the survey results excludes respondents that elected not to answer particular questions. Excluding missing data may misrepresent information if the missing data reflects a significant

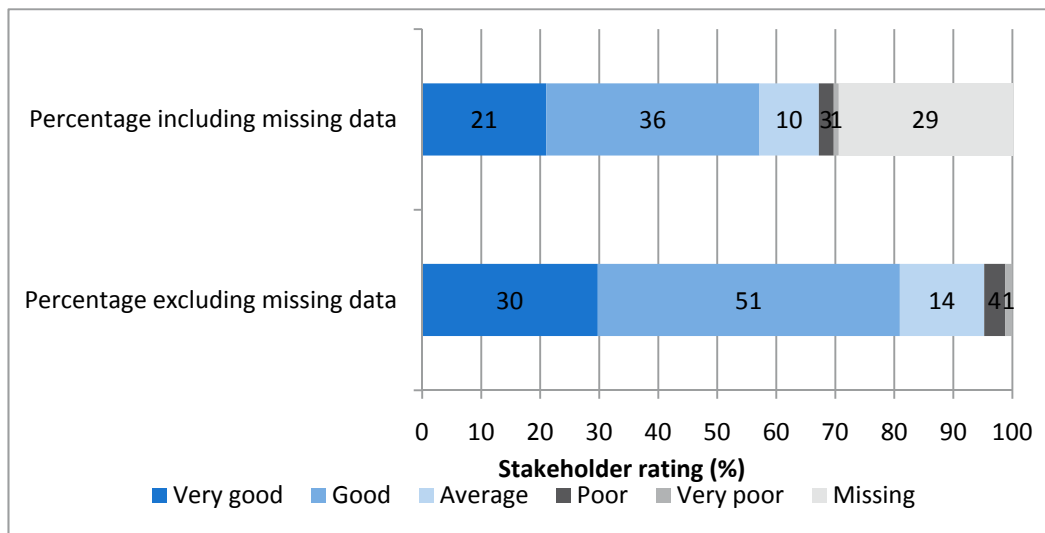
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<sup>109</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *FRSP Sector e-News, Issue 25* [Internet]. FaHCSIA, Australia, 2009, available from <<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/Documents/newsletters/frsp/i25.htm>> [accessed 13 October 2009].

proportion of the respondents. The ANAO found that when the missing data was included in analysis of the 2009 survey, 57 per cent of stakeholders rate CSA's stakeholder engagement efforts as 'good' or 'very good', rather than the 81 per cent of stakeholders reported by CSA. Figure 5.2 demonstrates that excluding missing data over-represents the proportion of stakeholders that are reported to be satisfied with CSA's engagement.

**Figure 5.2**

**Stakeholder rating of CSA's engagement efforts in 2009**



Source: ANAO analysis of CSA Engagement Survey responses, 2009.

**5.29** CSA reports the results of its stakeholder engagement surveys in its annual reports and stakeholder newsletters.<sup>110</sup> The results have also been used to initiate changes to CSA's engagement, such as reviewing the Child Support National Stakeholder Engagement Group membership. Given that CSA has committed to surveying stakeholders annually, and that the survey is the major source of performance data for stakeholder engagement activities, it is important that the reported survey results accurately represent stakeholder views. The ANAO suggests that CSA review the survey to ensure consistency between its purpose, distribution method, target sample and questions.

<sup>110</sup> Child Support Agency, *Child Support Stakeholder News August 2009* [Internet] CSA, Australia, 2009, available from <<http://www.csa.gov.au/newsletter/StakeHolderNewsletters/August2009.aspx>> [accessed 14 October 2009]; and Department of Human Services, *Annual Report 2007-08* [Internet]. DHS, Australia, 2008, available from <<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/dhs/publications/annual-reports/0708/part3/performance/effective-stakeholder-relations.html>> [accessed 14 October 2009].

## Useful information products

**5.30** CSA assessed the extent to which its information products are user-friendly and relevant to customer needs through reply-paid feedback forms in various newsletters and publications.

**5.31** Customers, stakeholders and community members have provided overwhelmingly positive ratings of CSA's publications. In July 2007, 99 per cent of 1169 readers rated CSA's series of booklets about issues associated with separation as satisfactory or excellent.<sup>111</sup> Eighty-nine per cent of readers also gave CSA's newsletter similar ratings in surveys during October 2007 and May 2009.<sup>112</sup> Almost 90 per cent of respondents found the newsletter easy to read and around 70 per cent found the newsletter to be relevant to them.

**5.32** The ANAO suggests that CSA continue to periodically measure the relevance of products to customers to ensure they remain useful communication tools. This can assist CSA to identify where the introduction of new products or changes to existing products may be required.

## Improved perceptions of CSA

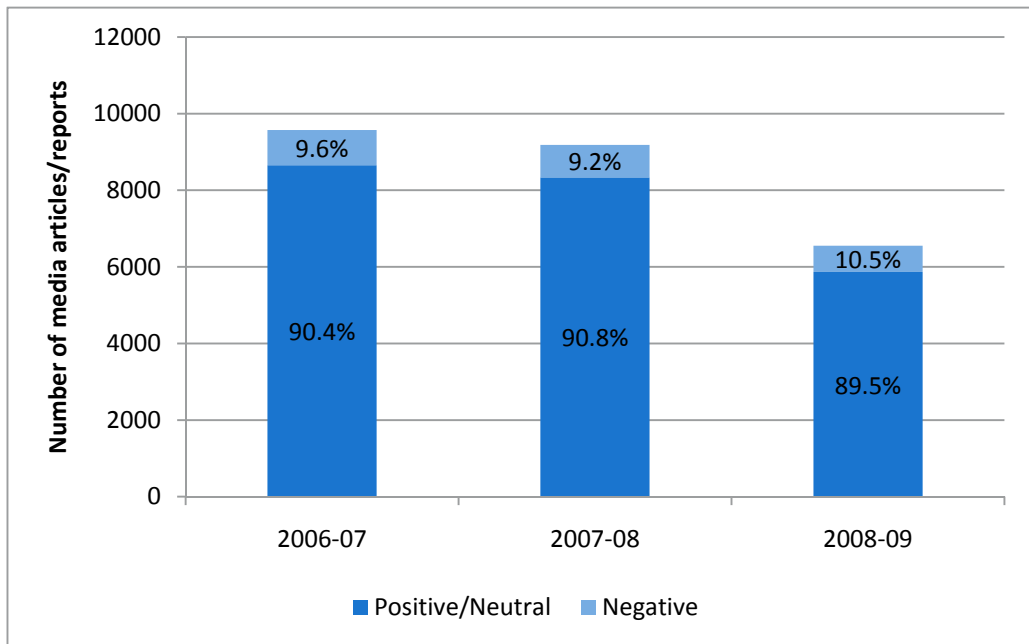
**5.33** CSA uses the proportion of media reports (television, radio) and articles (print) that are positive, neutral or negative in nature as its measure of improved perceptions of CSA. Reporting on this measure categorises articles and reports determined to be neutral and positive together.

**5.34** Figure 5.3 shows that in each year from 2006–07 to 2008–09 approximately 90 per cent of media coverage was categorised as positive or neutral.

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<sup>111</sup> Child Support Agency, *Publication Feedback October 2007*, 2007; and Child Support Agency, *Child Support Matters Feedback October 2007*, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> ANAO analysis of Child Support Agency, *May 09 Child Support Matters Feedback – uncollated*, 2009.

**Figure 5.3****Positive/neutral and negative media coverage of CSA, 2006–07 to 2008–09<sup>113</sup>**

Source: Child Support Agency, *Media Items Analysis*, 2009; Child Support Agency, *BBCSA Outcomes Report*, 2008.

**5.35** The nature of media reports shows that overall the coverage is predominately positive or neutral, but this analysis is limited in that: there is no benchmark data; the categorisation is broad with the split between positive and neutral not reported; and the measure reflects information that customers and stakeholders could be influenced by but does necessarily reflect customers' and stakeholders' actual perceptions of CSA.

## Conclusion

**5.36** CSA customers and stakeholders have become increasingly satisfied with CSA's communication and stakeholder engagement efforts since the BBCSA program implementation commenced. This is demonstrated through numerous survey results and measures including:

<sup>113</sup> Media coverage related to CSA declined during this period, particularly articles and reports about compliance (from 1669 items in 2007–08 to 777 items in 2008–09). The announcement and introduction of the Child Support Scheme Reforms was the focus of many articles in 2006–07 and 2007–08 and was not as prominent in 2008–09.

- customer agreement with the statement that ‘CSA is now communicating better with parents, the community and organisations’ increased significantly between May 2007 and August 2008 (42 per cent to 74 per cent for receiving parents, and 43 per cent to 64 per cent for paying parents);
- customer awareness and positive feedback on improvements and information products increased; and
- perceptions of CSA, measured through the balance of positive/neutral and negative media coverage, have remained high.

**5.37** There are some areas that CSA could revise to further improve these positive outcomes, including addressing customer and stakeholder issues associated with its letters and forms, and investigating the increasing level of stakeholder dissatisfaction with CSA’s lack of action in response to issues raised.

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Ian McPhee  
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT  
22 June 2010



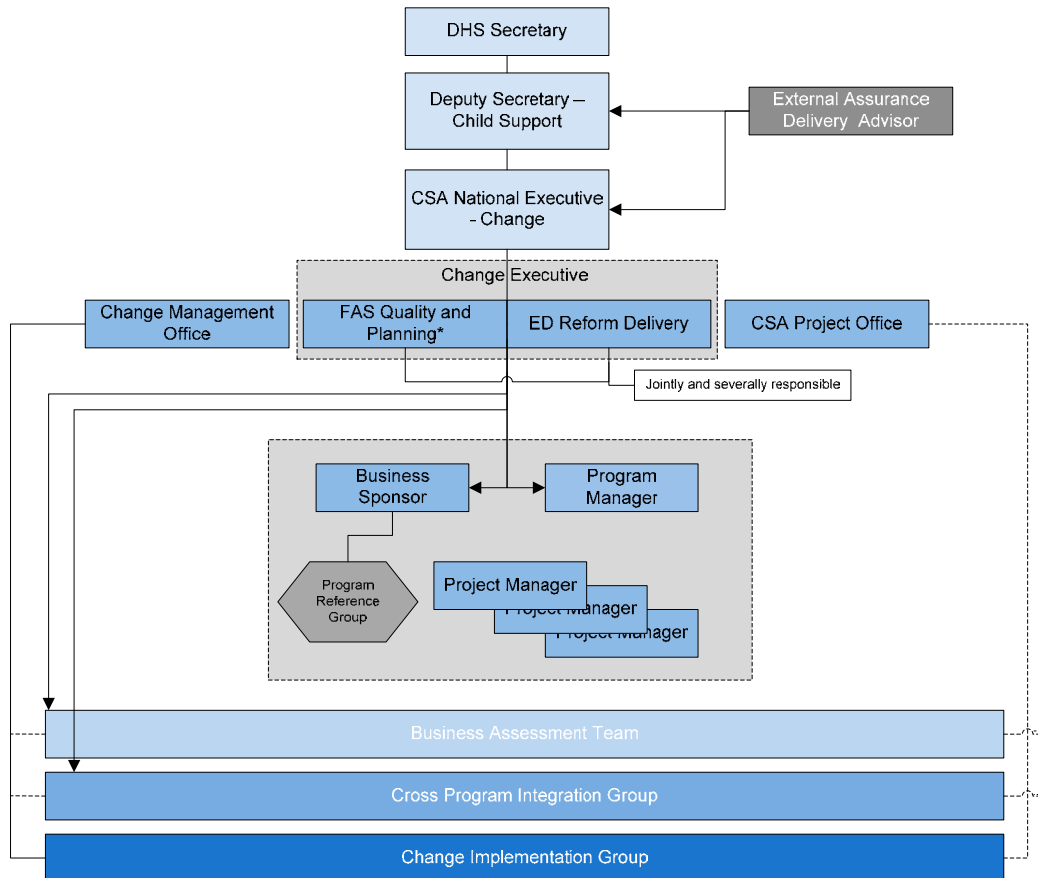
# Appendix



## Appendix 1: CSA's Child Support Reforms governance framework

Figure A 1

### CSA's Child Support Reforms governance framework



Source: Child Support Agency, *Project Management Framework*, 2008, p. 5.

\* This position was known as Deputy General Manager (DGM), Change Program.

1. The figure above shows that CSA incorporated various teams and offices in its governance framework, which had different roles and responsibilities, including:
  - *National Executive Change's* role was to approve all projects (including project commencement, budget and release of funds). The NEC comprised CSA's Deputy Secretary, First Assistant Secretaries, Executive Director Reform Delivery, Assistant Secretary Planning and

Change Management<sup>114</sup> and external 'critical friends.' The NEC met fortnightly.

- *Project Office's* role was to oversee and coordinate all projects and major business change within CSA, including coordinating CSA's internal project and program reporting and having responsibility for the application of the project management framework in CSA.
- *External Assurance Delivery Advisor* was engaged by CSA to independently review and report on the implementation of the Child Support Reforms. Part of the role of the External Assurance Delivery Advisor was also to provide advice about the implementation of the Child Support Reforms and to highlight and suggest mitigation action for risks associated with implementation.
- *Change Executive* were responsible for the delivery of CSA's Child Support Reforms; endorsing project proposals; and making recommendations to the NEC about project business plans. It consisted of the First Assistant Secretary, Quality and Planning and Executive Director, Reform Delivery. The Executive Director, Reform Delivery was an external consultant and the FAS, Quality and Planning was a CSA officer. The Change Executive met fortnightly with each program team.

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<sup>114</sup> This position was known as Assistant General Manager, Change Management.

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