Research Paper

Helpline evaluation 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) commissioned TNS to conduct research during 2009 into caller attitudes and satisfaction with its national telephone Helpline. This research comprised two elements: two waves of a quantitative survey using a combination of postal and online methodology; and qualitative research using focus groups and depth interviews. Unless otherwise stated, the summary findings below are from the second wave of the quantitative survey and exclude those who did not respond.

Survey response

- Wave 1 of the survey was conducted late February – early April 2009. It included the responses of 2,018 callers, with a response rate of 50 per cent.
- Wave 2 of the survey was conducted November – December 2009. It included the responses of 1,885 callers, with a response rate of 47 per cent.
- The qualitative field work was conducted in June and July 2009. It included two focus groups and 12 depth interviews.

Respondent Profile (see Chapter 2)

- Callers to all 12 Acas Helpline offices responded to the survey.
- Employees made up a large and increasing proportion of respondents (48 per cent). Employers constituted 24 per cent of callers, followed by employee representatives (12 per cent), employer representatives (10 per cent) and former employees (7 per cent).
- Callers also tended to be:
  - Female (66 per cent)
  - Aged between 35 and 49 (43 per cent)
  - Living in the South East of England (13 per cent), the North West (12 per cent) or the West Midlands (11 per cent).
  - White British (91 per cent) and English-speaking (98 per cent).
  - Christian (72 per cent) or not religious (25 per cent).
  - Straight/heterosexual (98 per cent).
  - From workplaces with under 50 employees (62 per cent).
  - Working in ‘public administration, education and health’ (24 per cent of callers worked in this sector), ‘retail, hotels and restaurants’ (20 per cent), or ‘finance and real estate’ (19 per cent).
  - Employed full-time (55 per cent)
  - Working in the private sector (57 per cent)
  - Without a personnel or Human Resources (HR) specialist or department in their workplace (49 per cent)1.
  - Not a member of a trade union (85 per cent)

1 Compared with 46% of respondents with an HR specialist (6% of respondents didn’t know).
Awareness and experience of the Helpline (see Chapter 3)

- The average (mean) number of times respondents had called the Acas Helpline in the previous 12 months has continued to reduce from 3.69 in 2007 to 3.17 in 2009:Wave 1 and 2.93 in 2009:Wave 2.

- There has been a large improvement during 2009 in the ability for callers to get through to the Helpline on their first attempt. The vast majority (91 per cent) of callers managed to get through either immediately, or 'reasonably promptly' (compared to 52 per cent in wave 1 of 2009). This is a particularly important improvement as the call wait time had been described as the main barrier to, and most negative aspect of the service².

- Consequently callers’ satisfaction with the length of time taken to answer the call has improved dramatically, from 57 per cent in wave 1 to 89 per cent in wave 2.

- The large majority (95 per cent) of callers regarded the length of their conversation as being ‘about right’.

- A recommendation from a work colleague or friend was the most common way for respondents to have become aware of the Acas Helpline (36 per cent). The Acas website was also common (29 per cent). Sources of awareness differed by caller type.

- Some focus group participants considered Acas as generally having a low profile. Many remembered previous media publicity from many years ago as being the hook for the basis of their recall and awareness.

- The most common subjects covered in respondents’ calls to the Helpline at wave 2 were ‘discipline, dismissal and grievance’ (41 per cent) and contracts (also 41 per cent). This has changed since wave 1, when ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ were clearly the most common (48 per cent) – possibly reflecting the changing UK economic climate.

- When respondents were asked to identify the single ‘main subject’ of their call 25 per cent stated discipline, dismissal and grievance, while 24 per cent mentioned redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers. The latter was more prevalent in wave 1 of 2009 (35 per cent). The ‘main subject’ of the call was found to vary by caller type and gender.

- The information provided by the adviser was judged to be valuable by 90 per cent of callers while 88 per cent stated that it had helped them decide what to do next and 87 found it had answered their enquiry in full. These measures had all improved slightly since wave 1 of 2009.

- Perceptions of the Acas member of staff across nine separate performance measures were very high, including 99 per cent of respondents who agreed that the Acas member of staff was polite and 98 per cent who agreed they behaved in a professional manner. This was consistent with findings from the qualitative research where the Helpline advisers were complemented on many occasions. Employee focus group and interview participants often praised advisers’ ability to handle callers who were emotionally distressed.

² Please note that the qualitative participants were recruited from those who had called the Helpline in January (as with wave 1 survey respondents). Longer hours and reduced waiting times were not in place at the time of their call. Also, this group was deliberately recruited from those with lower levels of overall satisfaction.
Following the call to the Acas Helpline (see Chapter 4)

- Discussing the problem with management, employees(s) or Human Resources was the most common option pursued by callers following their call to Acas (44 per cent of callers). This is consistent with previous surveys. The proportion of those who took no further action following their call has continued to reduce.

- Around half (52 per cent) of all employers confirmed that they had updated or improved existing policies at their workplace as a result of the call, while one-third (33 per cent) had implemented new policies.

- Around one-third (32 per cent) of current and former employees had been thinking about making a claim to the Employment Tribunal (ET) before their call. A similar proportion (34 per cent) confirmed having discussed the option of making an ET claim during their call. In the event, 12 per cent reported having gone on to actually make an ET claim.

- Three quarters (77 per cent) of current and former employees thought that their call to the Helpline had been important (either very or fairly) in helping them decide whether or not to make an ET claim.

- 23 per cent of employee callers who had been considering an ET claim decided against this course of action as a result of their call.3

Satisfaction with the Helpline (see Chapter 5)

- Overall satisfaction with the service received was very high with 95 per cent of callers stating that they were satisfied. Furthermore, 81 per cent said they were either extremely or very satisfied (an increase from 75 per cent at wave 1).

- Likelihood of re-use is very high amongst callers, with 97 per cent confirming that they would use the Helpline again in future if they had other enquiries relating to employment issues. The same percentage of callers stated that they were likely to recommend the Helpline to a friend or work colleague. The results are broadly consistent with previous surveys.

Use of the Acas website and other resources

- The vast majority (92 per cent) of callers had access to the internet and half (50 per cent) of these callers had tried to find the answer to their enquiry on the Acas website before making their call.

- Most callers (84 per cent) considered themselves likely to use the Acas website as an information source in future, while 61 per cent of callers thought they were likely to use Acas publications in future.

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3 See Section 4.3 for further details regarding the overall level of claim avoidance. See also Appendix C for an impact calculation estimating the volume of ET claims avoided.
1. **INTRODUCTION**

This report summarises the findings from research carried out by TNS on behalf of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) to evaluate its national telephone Helpline service.

1.1 **Overview of the Helpline service**

The national Helpline provides advice on employment relations issues to employers, employees and their representatives, dealing with more than one million calls each year across 12 regional offices.

Since 2007, the Helpline has been undergoing a significant change programme in response to the Gibbons Dispute Resolution Review, which recommended that the Government develop new services to promote early dispute resolution. As a result, the Helpline received investment to implement a number of changes. The main changes included new telephony and call queuing systems, new software for managers to monitor the flow of calls, changes to the way advisers answer calls, the recruitment of more advisers and longer opening hours.

A significant change (particularly from a research perspective) has been the introduction of a new ‘Data Capture System’ (DCS) which captures key management information about each caller (much of this information was not previously collected).

1.2 **Background to the survey**

The key objective of the research is to assess customer attitudes and experiences of the Acas Helpline. A two-wave approach has been used in order to measure the effect of various changes to the Helpline service during 2009. Other objectives include building on long-term findings from similar surveys conducted in 2005 and 2007 and investigating differences between different caller ‘types’ (i.e. employers, employees and third parties). The findings will contribute to the wider programme of the assessment of Acas against its performance targets and will feed into the 2010 Annual Report.

The research included both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative element was broken into two waves:

- Wave 1 was conducted between 23 February and 3 April 2009, with callers having been invited to take part during a call to the Helpline made over a one-week period in January 2009
- Wave 2 was conducted from 9 November to 18 December 2009, with callers who were invited in a one-week period in October of the same year.

Callers were given the option of taking part either using a paper questionnaire or online. Details of the survey method are provided in the Technical Appendix.

The qualitative fieldwork was carried out from 16 June to 7 July 2009, in between the two waves of the survey. It included a number of focus groups and depth interviews with callers to the Helpline. This work investigated why callers feel the way they do about the Helpline and the Helpline adviser. It complements the quantitative study
and has been used to probe more deeply into issues covered within, and raised by the survey.

1.3 Notes on analysis

The bulk of the discussion in the report focuses on the results of the most recent wave of the survey and whether these differ from the wave one results. For key questions results have also been compared to 2007 and even 2005. Findings from the qualitative research (including quotes from participants) have been used to support and develop the findings where appropriate. The qualitative research is covered in detail in a separate chapter of the report (Chapter 6).

For most survey questions a small proportion of respondents failed to provide a response (as typically happens when a postal methodology is used). Throughout the report, respondents who did not state a response to a question are excluded from the analysis unless otherwise stated.

1.4 Structure of the report

Analysis of the results by caller type is provided in the main body of the report and supported by Supplementary Tables at the end of the document. The report is divided into five main chapters:

- Respondent profile – analysis of callers using the Helpline over the two waves
- Awareness and experience of using the Acas Helpline
- Following the call – impact of the call including options pursued as a result
- Satisfaction with the Helpline
- Findings from the qualitative research

Methodological details are provided in the Technical Appendix and all research tools including the survey questionnaires and qualitative topic guides are available in the final section of this report.
2. RESPONDENT PROFILE

2.1 Demographic details

This chapter provides an overview of the respondent profile for the second wave of the survey conducted late 2009. In the demographic section of the questionnaire, unlike other sections, respondents were asked to answer just those questions they felt comfortable with. For the online survey participants were able to move past these questions without selecting an answer. In most cases almost all respondents have answered the question. Where ‘not stated’ makes up a high proportion of responses this has been described in the text.

2.1.1 Gender

Two-thirds (65 per cent) of wave 2 respondents were female, indicating that there were twice as many calls from women as from men. This is very similar to the profile of callers in wave 1 of 2009, as well as for the 2007 and 2005 surveys. It has long been established that the profile of Helpline callers is skewed towards women; a fact which is reflected in the sample profile across the two quantitative surveys (66 per cent female / 33 per cent male). This section presents analysis of caller type, call subject and Employment Tribunal consideration by gender to explore differences between male and female callers:

- As shown in Table 1, women are overrepresented among all types of caller with this difference being more pronounced among employers / representatives of employers compared with employees / representatives of employees (76 per cent and 61 per cent of callers were female respectively). Similarly, this finding is more pronounced among representatives (of both employers and employees) than it is among unrepresented callers (76 per cent and 64 per cent of callers were female respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Gender profile by type of caller</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer or employee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers / reps of employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All callers (waves 1 & 2) - 3903

Comparisons between callers and the UK labour force have been made where appropriate throughout this section. However, it should be noted that the population of all callers is not directly comparable with the wider working population (specifically it substantially over-represents third parties and staff in HR/personnel roles). Therefore comparisons have been made only when looking at employees – although even these should be regarded as indicators rather than like-for-like comparisons.
The origin of overrepresentation of women is likely to be different among different types of caller. Among employers, female overrepresentation is largely self-explanatory – we might expect a relatively high proportion of women among employer callers as traditionally staff in HR and personnel roles in the UK tend to be female\(^5\). Female overrepresentation is possibly just a reflection of the profile of the UK workforce in these areas. It is less clear why this might be the case among representatives but again one explanation is that women account for a relatively high proportion of professional representatives (solicitors, lawyers, advisers) who specialise in employment law\(^6\).

It is less clear why more female employees contact the Helpline than male employees. There are actually more men than women employed in the UK (accounting for 52 per cent of all people in full or part-time employment) with the gender gap widening further if we look just at those in full time employment (63 per cent)\(^7\). On this basis we might expect more calls from male rather than female employees. However, the analysis presented in Table 2 (which is limited to calls made by unrepresented employees and former employees) may go some way to explaining why more female than male employees call the Acas Helpline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Type of call among employees (by gender)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, paternity, adoption rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, dismissal, grievance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence, sick leave, stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday, work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy, layoff, transfer of contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All employees (waves 1 & 2) - 2105

- As shown in Table 2, women were more likely than men to have called about: maternity, paternity or adoption rights; absence, sick leave or stress, and; family friendly policies. This might be expected given that women are arguably more likely to experience family-related issues in the workplace than are men.

- It is also worth noting the proportion of part-time employees that called the Helpline. All employees were asked to indicate whether they were working full or part-time at the time of the survey. The ratio of full to part-time employees

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\(^5\) The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) 2004 found that three-quarters of HR managers and two-thirds of personnel managers were women (see Kersley et al, *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, Abingdon: 2006, pp.44-45).

\(^6\) See again WERS 2004 on the so-called “feminization of the employment relations function” (ibid, pp.44-45).

\(^7\) Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009
in total was 68:32 per cent. However, looking at this by gender we see that it rises to 89:11 per cent among men and falls to 57:43 per cent among women, illustrating that female callers were more likely to be employed part-time compared with male callers. In fact calls from women in part-time employment account for nearly one in five (19 per cent) employee calls to the Helpline.

- In terms of the subject of the call, men were more likely than women to be calling about redundancy, layoffs or transfer of contract. Among all callers to the Helpline (across both survey waves) 32 per cent of employees (including former employees) were calling about redundancy, layoff, transfer or contract or other related issue. Looking just at male employees this rises to nearly 40 per cent (compared with just 27 per cent of female employees). Female employees were more likely than male employees to be calling about maternity, paternity and adoption (8 per cent and less than 1 per cent respectively). Further discussion of call subject can be found in Section 2.5.

Gender differences were also present in the findings related to Employment Tribunals:

- The proportion of male employees who said they were thinking about making a claim to an Employment Tribunal (ET) was significantly higher than among women (39 and 26 per cent respectively) as was the proportion who had made a claim or were thinking about making a claim following their call to Acas (see Table 3). It is not clear whether this represents gender differences in the severity of workplace problems faced or a greater disposition for men to use legal processes to deal with their problems.

| Table 3: Consideration of making a claim before and after the call (by gender) |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                                 | Male     | Female    | Total |
| Whether thinking about making a claim to the ET before calling |          |          |       |
| Yes                             | 39       | 26        | 31    |
| No                              | 51       | 62        | 57    |
| Don’t know                      | 11       | 12        | 12    |
| Following your call to the Acas Helpline have you made a claim to the Employment Tribunal? |          |          |       |
| Yes - I have made a claim       | 16       | 9         | 12    |
| No - not made a claim, but thinking about it | 30       | 22        | 25    |
| No - not made a claim and not thinking about it | 55       | 69        | 63    |

Base: All employees (waves 1 & 2) - 2105

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8 The equivalent ratio in the wider labour force is 76:24; hence there is in total an over-representation of part-time workers as callers to the Helpline (Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009).

9 This reflects the relative proportions of male and female employees in full and part-time employment: among men the ratio of full to part-time employees is 87:13 and among women it is 55:45 (Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009).
Further analysis of subject of call by gender and age is provided in Supplementary Table S9. The impact of the Helpline on claims to the Employment Tribunal is covered in detail at Section 4.3.

2.1.2 Age

Respondents were asked to give their age in years. This analysis suggests that callers to the Acas helpline are concentrated in the 35-49 age bracket.

- The mean (average) age of respondents was 45 years old, with no difference between the two waves of research.
- A profile of respondent age is provided in Table 4. As with wave 1 of 2009, as well as the 2007 and 2005 surveys, a large proportion of respondents were aged between 35 and 49. Overall, the age profile of callers has been fairly static over the last four years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007*</th>
<th>W1 - 2009*</th>
<th>W2 - 2009*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 59</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>1,777</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>1,788</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-responses have been excluded from percentage calculations

- Age varied very little by caller type – third party employee representatives tended to be slightly older than employees. The average age of employee representatives was 47.9 years old compared with 44.6 for all callers. Employer representative and former employee callers were found to be slightly younger than the average, with mean ages of 42.1 and 42.5 respectively.
- Compared to the working (employed or self employed) population of the UK\textsuperscript{10}, employee respondents tended to be older on average. Persons aged 34 or younger are underrepresented amongst callers, while 35-59 year olds are over-represented. Those aged 60 or over are represented in the same proportion as the working population of the UK.

\textsuperscript{10} Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009
2.1.3 Region

The Government Office Region (GOR) where callers are resident can be seen in Table 5. This was taken from the postcode and addresses that respondents supplied when asked if they would participate in the survey, and were used to send the postal questionnaire11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base** 1,882

*Note. *Northern Ireland has been excluded from the table due to a very low base size (>1%). Where GOR was not able to be identified the details have been excluded from the table.

- Callers from the South East of England made up the largest proportion (13 per cent), followed by the North West (12 per cent) and West Midlands (11 per cent). The North East and Wales (5 per cent each) were the regions with the lowest percentage of callers to the Helpline (excluding Northern Ireland). This profile is similar to that of the population of the UK as a whole. The regional profile was consistent across both waves of research12.

2.1.4 Other personal characteristics

Respondents were asked to state their ethnic group, religious denomination, sexual orientation and whether they had a long term illness, health problem or disability. These questions were not compulsory for the respondent to complete. Findings from questions covering these personal characteristics are discussed below.

- The vast majority of respondents described their ethnic group as White British (91 per cent)13. English was considered the first or main language for almost all respondents (98 per cent). In this respect the ethnic profile of respondents is consistent between waves 1 and 2.

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11 Postal addresses were recorded for all callers agreeing to take part in the survey, including those preferring to complete the online version.
12 Note that the region where callers are resident does not have any bearing on the Acas office that handles their call.
13 Similarly, 90 per cent of employee callers described themselves as White (including White British, Irish or other) which reflects the working population of the UK (91 per cent white - Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009).
• One out of ten callers (eleven per cent) regarded themselves as having a long-term illness, health problem or disability expected to last for more than one year. This is comparable to the wave 1 and 2007 results (10 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). Of these respondents eight out of ten agreed that this affected the amount or type of work they could do.

• When asked to indicate their religious denomination, 72 per cent selected Christian, 25 per cent selected ‘None’ and three per cent other (including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Other).

• Most respondents (98 per cent) considered their sexual orientation to be straight or heterosexual, with two per cent selecting gay, lesbian, homosexual or bisexual. A relatively high proportion (seven per cent of all respondents) chose not to answer.

2.2 Caller type

Employees clearly make up the largest proportion of callers (48 per cent), followed by employers, who constituted one-quarter of callers (see Table 6). However, if we treat employer representatives who were employed directly by the organisation they were representing as employers, the gap between the percentage of employees and employers narrows (see 2.2.1).

The trend over time seems to be for an increasing proportion of calls from employees. By the time of the wave 2 survey, the proportion was higher than it had been during any of the survey periods since 2005 (including an increase from 44 per cent at wave 1 to 48 per cent at wave 2). This finding is consistent with the data collected in the Acas DCS which follows the same trend.14

Employee representatives are also making up an increasing percentage of callers compared with 2005 and 2007. Employers constitute a considerably smaller percentage of callers compared to previous surveys (accounting for around one quarter of calls by the time of the wave 2 survey compared with around one third in 2005 and 2007).

Table 6: Type of callers (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As an employer</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an employee</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a former employee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On behalf of employer</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On behalf of employee</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>931</td>
<td>1,788</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>1,885</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 The DCS shows that 59 per cent of callers were employees in October 2009 and 55 per cent in January 2009 (the wave 2 and wave 1 sample collection months). Please note that the DCS information does not distinguish between former and current employees and as such is a amalgamation of these two groups. Also, the DCS data is collected by Helpline advisers for all calls, while the survey information is collected through the self completed postal questionnaire and is a sample of callers. Therefore the DCS and survey data should not be expected to match exactly.
2.2.1 Employer representatives

Respondents who had identified themselves as calling on behalf of an employer were asked if they were directly employed by the organisation they made the call about.

- Two-thirds (66 per cent) of employer representatives stated that yes, they were directly employed by the organisation they made the call about. This is comparable with the proportion at wave 1 (68 per cent). The remaining one-third of employer representatives were employed by another organisation or were self-employed.

- Those who are classified as representatives but were directly employed by the organisation could be reclassified as employers (for example they might include HR representatives). If we reclassify these people then the percentage of calls from employers increases from 24 per cent to 30 per cent and the percentage of calls from employer representatives decreases from 10 per cent to only three per cent.

2.3 Callers’ job details

2.3.1 Size of workplace

All respondents were asked to indicate the number of employees in their workplace, and if they are part of a larger organisation, how many employees work for the organisation as a whole. The findings of these questions are presented below including some analysis of small or medium enterprises.

- Most callers came from workplaces with under 50 employees (62 per cent). This is consistent with results from wave 1 in early 2008 (64 per cent) as well as the 2005 and 2007 surveys. A higher proportion of employee callers to the Helpline came from a workplace with under 50 employees relative to the average UK worker (60 per cent and 49 per cent respectively)\(^\text{15}\).

- Respondents were asked to say how many employees there were at their workplace using seven categories so it is not possible to calculate a strict arithmetic mean (average). However an estimate of the mean can be calculated by substituting the mid-point from each point on the answer scale (for example an answer of 5-9 employees was treated as 7 employees) Using the mid-points from each of the seven points on the scale, the average workplace size was calculated to be 125 employees.

- Nearly half of all employees (45 per cent) stated that their workplace was part of a larger organisation (up from 40 per cent at wave 1). Of these, 31 per cent worked for organisations with less than 1,000 and 44 per cent for organisations with 1,000 or more employees. The remainder (25 per cent) did not know how many employees worked for the organisation as a whole.

- In total 56 per cent of respondents worked for small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) (a slight decrease from 60 per cent at wave 2) – this included those who worked for an organisation with fewer than 250 employees and those who worked at a workplace with fewer than 250 employees which was not part of a larger organisation. The proportion varied considerably by caller type – 83 per cent of employers and 77 per cent of employer representatives worked for SMEs compared with 44 per cent of

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\(^{15}\) Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009
employees, 45 per cent of former employees, and 35 per cent of employee representatives.

2.3.2 Industry and occupation

Industrial sector and occupational grouping were collected for all respondents. The categories discussed in the analysis are based on standard industrial classification (SIC) and standard occupational classification (SOC).

- As can be seen in Table 7 the industrial sector which covers the largest percentage of Helpline callers is ‘public administration, education and health’ (24 per cent of callers worked in this sector, up from 21 per cent at wave 1). Two other sectors covered a large proportion of callers; ‘retail, hotels and restaurants’ (20 per cent), and ‘finance and real estate’ (19 per cent)\(^{16}\).

- The most common occupational grouping among callers was found to be managers and senior officials (36 per cent), with administrative and secretarial occupations constituting around one-quarter of callers (24 per cent).

- Occupational groupings were highly variable according to caller group. Seven out of ten employers (71 per cent) were managers or senior officials and a further 20 per cent were in administrative and secretarial occupations. The same two groups were dominant for employer representatives, with 43 per cent managers and senior officials and 47 per cent administrative and secretarial.

- The occupations of employees, former employees and employee representatives were more broadly distributed across the occupational groupings:
  - One-quarter (24 per cent) of employees were managers/senior officials; 21 per cent had administrative/secretarial roles and 13 per cent were in ‘personal service’ occupations. Those in ‘elementary’ occupations, sales and customer services, professional occupations, skilled tradespeople and process/plant/machine operatives each accounted for around 10 per cent of employees. Compared with UK workers as a whole\(^{17}\) managers and senior officials were overrepresented amongst callers, as were administrative/secretarial, and ‘personal service’ occupations. Proportions of all other occupation groupings were either comparable to the UK workers, or slightly underrepresented.
  - Similarly, the largest occupational groupings for former employees were: administrative/secretarial (22 per cent); managers/senior officials (20 per cent); sales/customer service (12 per cent) and ‘personal service’ occupations (11 per cent).
  - A relatively high proportion of employee representatives chose not to state their occupation (14 per cent of all employee representatives).

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\(^{16}\) Labour Market Statistics are based on different industry groupings to those categories employed in the survey. Direct comparisons between the two are therefore not possible. Nevertheless, to the extent that there is read-across, ‘Finance and Real Estate’ would appear to be overrepresented in calls to the Helpline, while ‘Public Administration, Education and Health’ are underrepresented.

\(^{17}\) Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2009
those who did, 23 per cent were managers/senior officials and 22 per cent were in administrative/secretarial roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Industrial classification for respondents*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial sector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration, Education and Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail, Hotels and Restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (incl community, social and personal service activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation, storage and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-responses have been excluded from the base and percentage calculations

2.3.3 Other job details

Other job details collected as part of the survey were employment status, length of time the respondent’s organisation had been in operation, if they worked in the private or public sector, whether the respondent’s workplace had a personnel or HR specialist or department and if they were a member of a trade union.

- Over half of respondents were full-time employees at the time of their call (55 per cent) while 20 per cent were employed part-time and 16 per cent were unemployed. The profile of respondents was consistent with wave 1 in this respect and reflects the working population in the UK more widely (the ratio of full to part-time employees is around 76:24 per cent according to Labour Market Statistics\(^{18}\)).

- Three-quarters of callers were part of an organisation which had been in operation for more than five years. This is consistent with findings from wave 1 of 2009 and the 2007 survey.

- The majority of callers worked within the private sector (57 per cent) and one-quarter worked in the public sector (27 per cent). A relatively large percentage of respondents (10 per cent) did not know which sector they worked in.

- Personnel or Human Resources (HR) specialists or departments were present in 46 per cent of workplaces – similar to the profile in wave 1 of 2009 and 2007. The prevalence of HR specialists or departments increased with the size of the workplace and the majority of workplaces with 50 employees or more had an HR department.

- Just over one in ten callers (13 per cent) were members of a trade union, again consistent with the wave 1 survey.

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\(^{18}\) Labour Market Statistics, ONS, April-June 2010
2.4 Respondent knowledge of workplace policies and procedures

Respondents were asked if there were formal discipline and grievance procedures in their workplace. The large majority (71 per cent) said that these were in place (no change since wave 1). Around one sixth (15 per cent) stated that their workplace did not have formal discipline and grievance procedures and a similar proportion (14 per cent) said they did not know if these procedures were in place or not.

Employers were, unsurprisingly, more likely than other types of caller to be aware of discipline and grievance procedures (84 per cent said these were in place). In contrast only around two-thirds (67 per cent) of employees and half (50 per cent) of former employee callers stated that they were aware of procedures (see the Supplementary Tables).

2.5 Subject areas of the call

Respondents were asked two complementary questions regarding the subject of their call to the Acas Helpline. The first was used to identify all the various individual subjects covered and the second was to identify the single main subject of their call. From a list of 37 specific subjects, 10 headline subject groups have been established and can be seen in Table 8.

- The two most common subject groups covered by respondents’ calls to the Helpline were ‘discipline, dismissal and grievance’ and ‘contracts’ (41 per cent each). ‘Discipline, dismissal and grievance’ was the single main subject for 25 per cent of callers while contracts was the main subject for far fewer (14 per cent of respondents).

- The third most common subject group was ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ (discussed in 35 per cent of calls). This was listed by 24 per cent of callers as the main subject for their call, making it the second most commonly listed main topic area.

- The largest differences between waves 1 and 2 are the reduction in calls that cover ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ (reduced by 13 percentage points since wave 1) and the increase in calls about ‘discipline, dismissal and grievance’ (increased by 5 percentage points). Calls relating to discipline, dismissal and grievance are now back up to the same level seen in 2007 (41 per cent). The reduction in calls about ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ possibly reflects the stabilisation in the UK economy in the second half of 2009.

- Looking further back, the pattern of call topics for wave 2 of 2009 can also be said to be broadly similar to that of 2007. The exceptions to this are the increased percentage of queries involving contracts (31 per cent in 2007 as compared to 41 per cent in 2009 wave 2) and ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ (27 per cent in 2007; 35 per cent in 2009 wave 2). The proportion of queries involving maternity, paternity and adoption has reduced since 2007 (down from 23 per cent). These figures are in line with the management information collected by the Acas Helpline Data Capture System.
### Table 8: Helpline calls by subject of enquiry (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject of query*</th>
<th>Main subject</th>
<th>Subject of query*</th>
<th>Main subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, dismissal and grievance</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays and working time</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence, sickness and stress</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages (including National Minimum Wage)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, paternity and adoption</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and discrimination</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly policies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,839</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,837</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,997</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages do not sum to 100 as respondents were able to select more than one response

#### 2.5.1 Main subject area by caller type

The main subject of the call varied slightly by caller type, although the most common main subjects for all groups were either ‘discipline, dismissal and grievance’, or ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’. Table S3 in the Supplementary Tables summarises call subject by caller type.

- The main subject for former employees differed slightly from the overall percentages quoted in Table 8. Predictably, calls involving redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers were most common among this group (29 per cent said this was the main subject of the call). Calls about discipline, dismissal and grievance were almost as common (28 per cent). Wages were also a key concern for former employees, 21 per cent of whom considered this the main subject of their call. This is two and a half times the proportion for all respondents (8 per cent).

- For employees the most common main subject was ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ (27 per cent), closely followed by ‘discipline dismissal and grievance’ (25 per cent). The main subject of employees’ calls was otherwise very similar to the overall findings, which is unsurprising given that employees made up nearly half of all respondents.

- Employers were also very similar to the overall profile in terms of the main subject of their calls – but with the following exceptions. Employers made the lowest proportion of calls where the main subject was wages (two per cent). On the other hand, ‘maternity, paternity and adoption’ (11 per cent), and ‘absence sickness and stress’ (11 per cent) were more common main subjects for employers compared with the overall findings.

- The most common main subject for employer representatives was ‘redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers’ (26 per cent). ‘Discipline, dismissal and grievance’ accounted for 19 per cent of employer representative calls, while contracts was the main subject for 13 per cent.
Variation in main subject by region (GOR) was fairly minimal overall, although there was a relatively high proportion of calls relating to 'maternity, paternity and adoption' from callers in Scotland (11 per cent compared with 7 per cent overall). Similarly there was high proportion of calls about 'discipline dismissal and grievance' from callers in Wales (32 per cent compared with 24 per cent overall). There was also some regional variation in the proportion of calls relating to 'redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers' – taken overall these accounted for 24 per cent of all calls, with relatively high proportions in the North East (32 per cent), the East Midlands (30 per cent) and London (27 per cent).

Variation in call subject by gender is discussed at Section 2.1.1 (above) to explain the relatively large number of calls from female employees.
3. AWARENESS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE ACAS HELPLINE

3.1 Frequency of use of the Helpline

All callers were asked how many times they had called the Acas Helpline in the past year. This included the call in which they were asked to take part in the current survey.

- The mean (average) number of times respondents had used the Acas Helpline in the last 12 months was 2.93 with a median of 2 calls. The mean number of calls has reduced since previous Helpline satisfaction surveys (3.17 for wave 1 in early 2009 and 3.69 in 2007) while the median has remained constant since over this period. The reduction in mean number of calls to the Helpline may reflect the reduction in call waiting times and aborted calls discussed in Section 3.2 (some respondents may interpret an unsuccessful call as a ‘use’ of the Helpline). Decreasing calls may also be a function of the reduced proportion of callers who are employers.

- The average number of uses varied considerably between caller types with the heaviest users of the Helpline being employer representatives (a mean average of 5.9 calls in last year, or a median of 3) and employers (a mean average of 4.2 calls in last year, or a median of 3). Employees and former employees had called the Helpline the least number of times on average (2.1 and 1.9 respectively, median of 1 for each). See Table S2 in the Supplementary Tables for a full breakdown.

- Qualitative interviews with employers supported these findings, with several employers stating they called the Helpline regularly. In some instances they had used the Helpline over a number of years including in their roles with previous employers (see Chapter 6).

3.2 Getting through to the Helpline

Figure 1 shows callers’ responses to the question ‘When you tried to contact Acas, did you manage to speak to someone on your first call’\textsuperscript{19}. The chart illustrates responses for both wave 1 and wave 2 of 2009.

The findings show that callers at wave 2 got through to the Helpline much more quickly than at wave 1 with the vast majority (91 per cent) of callers managing to get through either immediately, or ‘reasonably promptly’ (compared to 52 per cent in wave 1 of 2009). Only 7 per cent of callers said they ‘got through eventually after being held in a queue for a long time’ (compared to 30 per cent in wave 1) and two per cent of callers had hung up and called again later (18 per cent in wave 1). This is clearly a large improvement on the findings from the first wave in early 2009. It is not possible to compare responses from previous surveys due to changes in Acas Helpline automated answering and queuing procedures. These findings are consistent

\textsuperscript{19} It should be noted that callers included in the sample were by definition those who were successful in getting through to the Helpline. The numbers given here will inevitably reflect that bias.
with the reduced waiting times of Acas Helpline callers measured by the Acas call management system\textsuperscript{20}.

The implications of improvements in call waiting times are wide ranging and considerable. Call waiting time is known to affect responses to other measures throughout the survey, including overall satisfaction with the service provided. For example, 97 per cent of callers who had got through immediately were satisfied overall (with 53 per cent saying extremely satisfied). This compares with 95 per cent of those who got through ‘promptly’ and 91 per cent who got through ‘eventually’. Overall satisfaction is discussed in Chapter 5.

**Figure 1: Whether got through to the Helpline on first attempt (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes - I got through almost immediately after being held in a queue for only a few seconds</th>
<th>Wave 1 - 2009</th>
<th>Wave 2 - 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through reasonably promptly after being held in a queue for a short while</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through eventually after being held in a queue for a long time</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - I was waiting too long so I hung up and called again later</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Base: All respondents, excluding non-response (Wave 1 - 1,993, Wave 2 – 1,831)*

Respondents who did not get through on their first attempt were asked how many times in total they had called before their call was answered. The average number of calls here was 3.0 (including the one where they spoke to a Helpline adviser). This is considerably lower than the wave 1 result of 4.4 – a finding which is consistent with the aforesaid increased ability to get through on the first attempt as illustrated in Figure 2.

- Excluding respondents who did not answer, the large majority (89 per cent) of callers were satisfied with the length of time it took for their call to be answered. This included respondents who were fairly satisfied (26 per cent), very satisfied (40 per cent), or extremely satisfied (23 per cent). Satisfaction has increased considerably since wave 1 when only 57 per cent of callers

\textsuperscript{20} Reduced waiting times reflect the improvements and investments Acas had made to the Helpline. Since wave 1 the opening hours of the Helpline have been extended to evenings and Saturdays and additional advisers have also been recruited. Both appear to have contributed to a significant reduction in reported waiting times.
were satisfied with the length of time taken to answer their call (either fairly, very or extremely). Satisfaction levels with call waiting time have now surpassed the level seen in the 2007 survey when 82 per cent of callers were found to be satisfied.

- Perhaps most importantly only a small minority (4 per cent) of callers were dissatisfied (fairly, very or extremely) with the length of time it took for their call to be answered. This compares to nearly one third (30 per cent) of callers who had been dissatisfied in wave 1 – meaning that the number of dissatisfied callers has decreased by a factor of seven between early and late 2009. Satisfaction with the length of time taken to answer the call has been illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with length of time taken to answer the call (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Wave 1 - 2009</th>
<th>Wave 2 - 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied Net</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents, excluding non-response (Wave 1 - 1,991, Wave 2 – 1,823)

Throughout the qualitative work (undertaken in between the two waves of the survey) the length of the wait was mentioned as the main and sometimes only negative aspect of the Helpline service. Improving this aspect of the service (as has clearly been achieved between waves 1 and 2) has therefore been key to improving the service as a whole. The quote below illustrate callers’ frustration with call waiting times in early 2009:

"The only bad thing I can say and it’s a huge bad thing is you keep phoning them and you’re lucky if you get through in a weeks time."

(Employee Representative)
3.3 Awareness of the Acas Helpline

All respondents were asked to indicate how they had become aware of the Acas Helpline. Respondents were able to select multiple options from a list of possibilities.

- A recommendation from a work colleague or friend was the most common way for respondents to have heard about the Acas Helpline (36 per cent of all respondents had heard about it this way). This is consistent with previous survey findings (wave 1 2009, 2007 and 2005). The statement below, made by a focus group participant typifies how many callers became aware of the Helpline:

  “My awareness was practically nothing really and my brother in law told me about them when I was having trouble at work”

  (Employee)

- The Acas website was the second most common means through which respondents had become aware of the Helpline (29 per cent). This was slightly lower than the wave 1 result (32 per cent) and may indicate that awareness via the Acas website has peaked after increasing steadily since 2007 and 2005. By comparison awareness was less likely through the Directgov website (10 per cent – www.direct.gov.uk) or the Business link website (5 per cent - www.businesslink.gov.uk). The third most common way of becoming aware of the Acas Helpline, consistent with wave 1, was through the caller’s company or organisation (13 per cent).

- The way that callers had become aware of the Helpline varied considerably by caller type. This can be seen in Table 9 below. Employees, former employees and employee representatives were most likely to hear of the Helpline through a recommendation from a work colleague or friend. Finding out through the Acas website was the second most common source of awareness for these groups, followed by hearing through the Citizens Advice Bureau.

- In contrast, employers and employer representatives were most likely to have heard about the Helpline via the Acas website (39 per cent and 44 per cent respectively). Employers were equally as likely to have heard of the Acas Helpline through colleagues or friends, or through their company (25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). Over one-third (35 per cent) of employer representatives mentioned their company or organisation as a source of awareness, while a recommendation from a work colleague or friend was the third most common method of awareness for this group (26 per cent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9: Top five sources of awareness by caller type (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation from a work colleague/friend</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acas website (<a href="http://www.acas.org.uk">www.acas.org.uk</a>)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your company/ organisation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directgov website (<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a>)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/ search engine</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Advice Bureau</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% as question was multi-coded
Several participants in the qualitative research mentioned that they had become aware of Acas (more generally) through media coverage of high profile employment disputes:

"I heard about them a while back when there were news strikes and their name came up then." (Employee Representative)

It is also worth noting that, in the qualitative work, some participants said that they had been aware of Acas for many years, sometimes having used the Acas Helpline a number of times in the past. This tended to be the case for employers who had often used the Helpline on a regular basis.

### 3.4 Information provided by the adviser

Respondents were asked to rate how far they agreed or disagreed with three statements regarding the information provided in their call to the Acas Helpline. A five-point scale running from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ was utilised for this purpose. Agreement was taken as being either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’.

- Of the three statements, agreement was highest with regard to the statement the information provided ‘was valuable to you’ (90 per cent of callers agreed). Around half (48 per cent) of all respondents strongly agreed with this statement, with only two per cent disagreeing.

- Almost the same percentage of the callers (88 per cent) agreed with the second statement that the information provided had ‘helped you to decide what to do next’, with 42 per cent strongly agreeing. Just 3 per cent disagreed with this to any extent.

- Agreement was lowest regarding the third statement; that the information provided had ‘answered your enquiry in full’, although 87 per cent of all respondents agreed with this. This was split evenly between those who strongly agreed (43 per cent) and those who agreed (44 per cent). Just three per cent disagreed with this to any degree.

Agreement levels for each of these statements over time are shown in Figure 3 below. The results show that levels of agreement increased somewhat between 2005 and 2007 and, for the main part, remain at a high level through 2009. If anything levels of agreement dipped slightly between the 2007 survey and wave 1 of 2009 before returning to 2007 levels by the time of wave 2.
3.4.1 Differences between groups of callers

Although levels of agreement with the three statements were high across all caller groups, there were some minor variations. Agreement with each of the statements by caller type is shown in Table S4 in the Supplementary Tables (for both waves 1 and 2).

- **Employer and employee representatives, and employers** were the groups most likely to agree with the three statements. Former employees and employees were relatively less likely to agree with them. Overall the findings suggest slightly more positive views among representatives and employers compared with employees. There is little evidence of changes in response by caller type between waves, but where changes do exist they do appear to reflect the minor improvements discussed earlier in this section.

- **Looking at work status among employees, callers who were self employed** were most likely to agree with the three statements. For instance 98 per cent of self-employed callers agreed that the information provided had been valuable, compared with 90 per cent of employees.

- **Those who did not have an HR specialist or department at their work were more likely to agree with the three statements**, compared to those who did not have this service at their place of work (this was also observed at wave 1).
• Callers from small or medium enterprises (SMEs)\(^{21}\) were slightly more likely to agree with each of the three statements about the information provided by the Helpline adviser. For example 89 per cent of those from an SME agreed that the information provided answered the enquiry in full, while 85 per cent from larger enterprises agreed with this statement (either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’).

• This echoes a finding previously identified in the 2007 survey, that callers without an HR department and callers from smaller organisations tend to find the Helpline especially valuable – the obvious link being that smaller organisations are less likely to have an HR specialist. Again it follows that the Helpline may be compensating for the lack of an HR function in these workplaces.\(^{22}\)

### 3.5 Perceptions of the Acas advisers

Callers were presented with a list of nine statements about the Acas member of staff they had spoken to and their handling of their call. As described in Section 3.4, a five-point scale of agreement was again used ranging from ‘strongly agree’ (5) to ‘strongly disagree’ (1). The nine statements have been presented in Table 10 alongside the percentage who agreed (including those who ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’) and the mean (average) score for each statement. The mean score was calculated using the five-point scale – i.e. a caller who agreed strongly was allocated a score of five and a caller who disagreed strongly was allocated a score of one.

• As in 2007 and wave 1 of 2009, levels of agreement were very high for all statements with over 90 per cent of respondents agreeing with all but one of the statements. Agreement was highest regarding the adviser having been ‘polite’ (99 per cent agreed that this was the case). The statement ‘the Acas member of staff explained the pros and cons of any options available to you’ met with the lowest level of agreement (80 per cent of all callers agreed with this). More than half of all callers answered ‘strongly agree’ to each of the statements except for the aforesaid ‘explained the pros and cons’ for which 47 per cent strongly agreed. The results indicate that Helpline advisers are continuing to perform to a very high standard in terms of these nine measures.

• The mean score calculations support these findings and show that responses to all of the statements, on average sit between ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ (as denoted by a score of between four and five).

• As shown in Table 10 there has been little variation in responses between 2007 and waves 1 and 2 of 2009, indicating that the majority of callers remain satisfied with this element of the service. If anything results from wave 2 show a recovery in performance following a slight drop between the 2007 and in wave 1 results. In some instances, performance has now marginally improved compared with the 2007 results. For instance 95 per cent of callers said the adviser gave them enough time to discuss their query, compared with 92 per cent in 2007 and wave 2 of 2009.

\(^{21}\) A small or medium enterprise (SME) is one where the organisation employs fewer than 250 employees.

The findings presented in this section are consistent with the views of participants in the qualitative focus groups and depth interviews (see Chapter 6). Qualitative participants tended to praise advisers and often felt they were the best part of the call experience:

‘From the start they put me at ease immediately and assured me that everything was confidential and to take my time and not feel rushed...I laid the problem out to them...they asked me a few questions and then they gave me the answer... the way to proceed’
(Employee)

‘They must stress people skills when they hire’ ( Employer)

Participants in the qualitative research also felt the performance of the Helpline adviser was particularly important considering the heightened emotional state of many callers. In most cases, the Helpline adviser was described as having been patient and displaying the characteristics listed above. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Wave 2 % agree</th>
<th>Wave 1 % agree</th>
<th>2007 % agree</th>
<th>Mean score Wave 2</th>
<th>Mean score Wave 1</th>
<th>Mean score 2007</th>
<th>Base (2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was polite</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(1,868)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaved in a professional manner</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>(1,848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented the information in an impartial way</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>(1,844)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened carefully to what you had to say</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(1,856)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave you enough time to discuss your query</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>(1,851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was knowledgeable</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>(1,850)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented information in a way you easily understood</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>(1,854)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood your query</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>(1,855)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained pros and cons of any options available to you</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(1,840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was courteous</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Bases do not include non-responses for both 2007 and 2009 (both wave 1 and wave 2). 2009 Bases vary with numbers of ‘not-stated’ responses. 2007 Base = 1,802*
3.6 The length of the call

All respondents were asked what they thought about the length of the conversation they had with the Helpline adviser. Response options included ‘too long’, ‘about right’ and ‘too short’.

- The large majority of callers regarded their conversation to be about right (95 per cent of all callers, representing a slight increase from 93 per cent at wave 1). Only five per cent of callers thought the conversation was too short and less than one per cent regarded the conversation as too long. This is consistent with findings from the qualitative research where participants tended to appreciate and value the amount of time that the adviser had dedicated to their call.

- Of the five caller types, former employees and current employees were the most likely to think that their conversation was too short (seven per cent and six per cent respectively). Although variations in response by caller type were minimal.

Table 11 shows perceived length of call split by agreement with the statement ‘thinking about your call, the information provided helped you to decide what to do next’. Respondents provided an answer on a five point scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). In Table 11 ‘strongly disagree’ has been aggregated with ‘disagree’ and ‘neither agree nor disagree’, while ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ have been presented separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of call</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither / disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too long</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too short</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,883</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-respondents have been excluded from the data.

Note: In order to increase the base size the neither / disagree column shows the results for three categories merged together – neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Almost all (99 per cent) callers who strongly agreed that the call to the Helpline had helped them decide what to do next had found the call length to be about right. By comparison 95 per cent of those who agreed had found the call to be about right. In contrast, three quarters of those who neither agreed nor disagreed/disagreed with the statement considered the call length to be about right. One-fifth of this group said they thought the call was ‘too short’. The findings suggest a relationship between the amount of time spent with the caller and the usefulness of the outcome. It is worth noting that participants in the qualitative research commented positively about the amount of time that the adviser had dedicated to their call and how this had helped them understand the options that were available. As one employee put it:
“To be honest, the lady spent a long time with me talking me through the process, but it’s a very very confusing process. She was very good and very patient with me going off on a tangent...”

(Employee)
4. FOLLOWING THE CALL TO THE ACAS HELPLINE

4.1 Further options pursued by callers

Respondents were given a list of eight options and asked which of these, if any, they had pursued following their call to the Acas Helpline. These options are shown in Table 12 with response for the 2009 (wave 1 and 2), 2007 and 2005 surveys. The options have been ranked according to percentage response in the most recent survey – wave 2 of 2009.

Table 12: Further options pursued by callers* (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Wave 2 2009</th>
<th>Wave 1 2009</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed the problem with management/employee(s)/HR</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied / implemented changes recommended by Acas</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought advice/assistance from another body (e.g. trade union, solicitor, Citizens Advice Bureau)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Acas again</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took no further action</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitted a formal complaint (under organisation’s grievance procedure)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took formal disciplinary action</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the grievance / disciplinary procedure</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base 1,859 1,997 1,802 931

* Note that responses sum to more than 100% as this question was multiple response. Also, non-respondents have been excluded from the 2009 and 2007 data.

- Discussing the problem with management, employees(s) or Human Resources was the most common option pursued (by 44 per cent of callers). This was also the case in wave one of 2009, 2007 and 2005. Of the different types of caller, former employees were half as likely to have pursued this option (21 per cent), while the majority of employer representatives had taken this action (55 per cent).

- One-quarter of callers (24 per cent) had applied or implemented changes recommended by Acas. This was the second most commonly pursued option and has increased from 18 per cent in 2007 but stayed consistent across both waves of 2009. Employer and employer representatives were most likely to have taken this action (43 and 36 per cent respectively).

- Seeking advice or assistance from another body was also fairly common (22 per cent) and has remained stable since 2005. This option was most likely to be pursued by former employees (32 per cent), while employer and employer representatives were the least likely to do so (12 and 16 per cent respectively). Of those who sought further advice, 41 per cent stated that they had done so following advice from Acas recommending this course of action.

- Almost one in five (18 per cent) callers reported having contacted Acas again. This option has remained consistent since 2005 and is now the fourth most often pursued by callers. Former employees were the most likely to contact
Acas again (22 per cent), while employee representatives were the least likely (13 per cent).

- Sixteen per cent of callers took no further action following their call to the Acas Helpline. The proportion of those taking no further action has been reducing slowly over time with the largest reduction between wave 1 and 2 of 2009.

A particular area of interest was the impact that the information provided by the Acas Helpline adviser had on the options pursued after the call. Table 13 shows the results of analysis which explores the options pursued after the call in relation to callers’ levels of agreement with the statement: ‘Thinking about your call, the information provided helped you to decide what to do next...’ (This statement utilised a five-point agreement scale. In Table 13 ‘strongly disagree’ has been aggregated with ‘disagree’ and ‘neither agree nor disagree’, while ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ have been presented separately).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options Pursued</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither / disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed the problem with management/employee(s)/HR</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied / implemented changes recommended by Acas</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought advice/assistance from another body (e.g. trade union, solicitor, Citizens Advice Bureau)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Acas again</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took no further action</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitted a formal complaint (under organisation’s grievance procedure)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took formal disciplinary action</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,859</strong></td>
<td><strong>731</strong></td>
<td><strong>801</strong></td>
<td><strong>211</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: In order to increase the base size the neither / disagree column shows the results for three categories merged together – neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.*

- Nearly half (48 per cent) of those who strongly agreed that the information provided had helped them decide what to do next said that they had discussed the problem with management. This compares with 37 per cent of those who disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed.

- One third (32 per cent) of those who strongly agreed that the information provided had helped them decide what to do next confirmed having applied or implemented changes recommended by Acas. One fifth (22 per cent) of those who agreed had implemented changes, and only seven per cent of the neither/disagree group had implemented changes.

- Only 13 per cent of those who strongly agreed that the information provided had helped them decide what to do next reported having taken no further action, while 16 per cent of those who agreed had taken no further action. This compares with 20 per cent of the neither/disagree group.
4.2 Impact of calls on employers’ policies and practices

Employers were asked if they had taken action regarding their policies as a result of their call to the Acas Helpline.

4.2.1 Updating or improving existing policies

Employers were first asked if they had updated or improved existing policies as result of their call to the Acas Helpline.

- Of the employers who answered this question, around half (52 per cent) confirmed that yes, they had taken this action following their call. This is largely consistent with the wave 1 survey (when 50 per cent confirmed this was the case)
- A further 45 per cent stated that they had not taken this action, and the remaining four per cent did not know (again no changed since wave 1).
- A relatively high proportion of employers did not answer this question (11 per cent of all employers) and have been excluded from the calculations above. The high level of non-response may reflect either an unwillingness to provide this type of information or else a questionnaire design flaw.

4.2.2 Implementing new policies

Secondly, employers were asked if they had implemented any new policies at their workplace as a result of their call to the Acas Helpline.

- One-third (33 per cent) of employers who answered this question had implemented new policies as a result of their call. The proportion was similar at wave 1 (35 per cent)
- Nearly two thirds (63 per cent) had not taken this action (up slightly from 59 per cent at wave 1) and four per cent did not know if any new policies had been implemented.
- As with the question above the proportion of not stated responses was relatively high (22 per cent of all employers did not respond) and have been excluded from the calculations.

4.3 Impact of the Helpline on claims to Employment Tribunal

4.3.1 Employees

Former and current employees were asked if they had been thinking about making a claim to the Employment Tribunal (ET) before calling the Helpline. The calculations below exclude respondents who did not provide an answer.

- Almost one-third (32 per cent) confirmed that they had been thinking about making a claim before their call (up from 30 per cent at wave 1). Slightly more than half (56 per cent) stated that they had not been thinking about making a claim before phoning (compared with 59 per cent at wave 1) and 12 per cent did not know.
• The percentage of those thinking about making an ET claim before phoning has continued to increase since the 2007 survey, when 23 per cent of employees had been considering making a claim prior to their call.

• As was shown in wave 1, former employees were again twice as likely to say they had been thinking about making a claim to an ET before their call compared with current employees (58 per cent and 28 per cent respectively) – see Table 14.

Table 14: Whether employees had considered making an ET claim before their call to the Helpline* (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Employees</th>
<th>Current Employees</th>
<th>Former Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I had been thinking about making a claim</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - I had not been thinking about making a claim</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-responses are not included in the Bases

All former and current employees were asked if they had discussed the option of making a claim to the Employment Tribunal during their call to the Acas Helpline. As elsewhere, the calculations below exclude respondents who did not answer the question.

• One-third (34 per cent) of employees confirmed that yes, they had discussed the option of making a claim during their call (comparable with wave 1 - 36 per cent). The remaining two-thirds (66 per cent) had not discussed this option.

• The majority (62 per cent) of former employees had discussed making a claim to the ET during their call (an increase from 57 per cent at wave 1). By comparison, only three-in-ten (30 per cent) of current employee callers had discussed this option.

• Not surprisingly, whether or not the option of making an ET claim was discussed during the call was strongly related to whether the caller had been thinking of making a claim beforehand:
  o Of those who discussed the option of making a claim, nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) had already been thinking about it before their call (whereas 24 per cent had not). This link was also observed at wave 1.
  o For those who did not discuss the option of an ET claim, only 14 per cent had previously been thinking about it, whereas the large majority (73 per cent) had not. See Supplementary Table S5 for further detail.

Next, former and current employees were asked if they had actually gone on to make a claim to the Employment Tribunal following their call to the Acas Helpline.

• Of all current and former employees, 12 per cent had indeed made a claim following their call to the Acas Helpline. This is comparable with the findings from wave 1 of 2009 and 2007 when 11 per cent and 13 per cent respectively had made a claim following their call.
One-quarter (24 per cent) of current and former employees stated that no, they had not made a claim but that they were thinking about it (comparable with wave 1 – 26 per cent).

The majority (64 per cent) confirmed that no, they had not made a claim and were not thinking about doing so. Again this suggests no change since wave 1 of 2009 (63 per cent).

Table 15 shows the relationship between whether employees had been considering making an ET claim before calling the Helpline, and whether they actually went on to make a claim after calling. As we might expect, the results show a link between intent before the call and action after:

- Of those who had been considering an ET claim before their call, 30 per cent went on to make a claim and a further 41 per cent stated that they had not made a claim but were thinking about it. This suggests that around seven in ten who were considering making a claim prior to the call were at least still considering it after speaking to an adviser. The results are broadly consistent with wave 1 in this regard (29 per cent went on to make a claim and 44 per cent had not but were thinking about it).

- Of those who had not been thinking of making a claim before their call the vast majority (83 per cent) reported that they had not made a claim and were not thinking about it. Only four per cent of this group had actually made an ET claim, and 13 per cent were thinking about it.

- Of those who didn’t know if they were considering a claim before their call, the majority (61 per cent) said that they had not made a claim and were not thinking about it.

Table 15 also provides a comparison between whether employees discussed the option of making an ET claim during their call, and whether they went on to make a claim after calling:

- Of those who discussed the option of making a claim, 29 per cent went on to actually make a claim (a slight increase from 25 per cent at wave 1) and 36 per cent said they had not made a claim but were still thinking about it (no change here since wave 1). This is a similar distribution to those who were considering making a claim, discussed above.

- Of those who did not discuss the option of making an ET claim during their call to the Helpline, the large majority (78 per cent) stated that they had not made a claim and were not thinking about it.

A comparison of former and current employees is also provided in Table 15. This shows that former employees were considerably more likely than current employees to have made a claim to the ET following their call to the Helpline (36 per cent, compared with 7 per cent). This is consistent with the fact that the job separation jurisdictions are the most common to lead to an Employment Tribunal – perhaps because it could be argued that by that stage the employee has little to lose.
Table 15: Variables determining whether former and current employees went on to make an ET claim after their call. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes - made a claim</th>
<th>No – have not made claim, but am thinking about it</th>
<th>No – have not made a claim and am not thinking about it</th>
<th>Base*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All current and former employees</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(1,021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering making a claim before call</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(306)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not considering making a claim before call</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>(610)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed making an ET claim during call</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(365)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not discuss making an ET claim during call</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>(655)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current employees</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>(862)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former employees</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>(159)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-responses are not included in the Base.
Note: percentages sum across rows, rather than columns

The final question aimed specifically at current and former employees asked how important their call to the Acas Helpline had been in helping them decide whether or not to make a claim to the Employment Tribunal. Importance was rated on a four point scale (‘very important’, ‘fairly important’, ‘not very important’ and ‘not at all important’). The calculations below exclude non-responses and those who considered the question to be ‘not applicable’ (one quarter of all current and former employees).

- Three quarters (77 per cent) of current and former employees who considered the question applicable to them thought that their call had been either very, or fairly important in helping them decide whether or not to make a claim (little change since wave 1 – 75 per cent).
- A minority (17 per cent) of this group thought the call was either not very, or not at all important in helping them reach their decision. The remaining seven per cent did not know how important the call was in this respect. The results are broadly consistent with wave 1.
- Results to this question can be examined separately for current and former employees. The large majority of both groups regarded their call to the Helpline as being important in helping them come to a decision about whether to make a claim. This was the case for 76 per cent of current employees and 80 per cent of former employees. As mentioned, these percentages exclude those who thought the question was not applicable to them.
- Table 16 (below) shows the results of further analysis examining the perceived importance of calls to the Helpline in aiding the decisions of all employees who had previously been considering an ET claim before calling. The influence of the call has been examined further by separating employees considering a claim into three mutually exclusive sub-groups:
  - Those who had made an ET claim following the call (group two in Table 16);
  - Those who had not made a claim but were thinking about it (group three in Table 16); and
  - Those who had not made a claim and were not thinking about it (group four in Table 16)
The large majority (84 per cent) of callers who had been considering a claim before their call said that the call was either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important in helping them decide whether or not to make a claim (group 1 in Table 16).

Further analysis revealed similar results between the three sub-groups shown in Table 16. This means that, of respondents considering an ET claim, the call to the Helpline was important for both those who went on to make a claim, and those who didn’t. However, given Acas’ remit to encourage dispute resolution without recourse to legal proceedings, it is the Helpline’s impact on ET claim avoidance which is of particular interest. Here, as can be seen in Table 16, of those callers who had been considering an ET claim prior to calling but subsequently did not make a claim (and were no longer thinking about doing so), 86 per cent credited the Helpline as having been important in helping them reach this decision (group four in Table 16).

It follows that, overall, 23 per cent of employee callers considering an ET claim decided against this course of action as a result of their call. This overall level of claim avoidance is based on two statistics: a) 27 per cent of those callers who had been considering an ET claim prior to calling subsequently did not make a claim and were no longer thinking about it (see Table 16) and; b) of this group, 86 per cent subsequently reported that their call had been important in helping them reach that decision (see Table 16). Due to the low base size of this sub-group (88 respondents) caution should be exercised when making use of this finding.

Table 16: Perceived importance of call to the Acas Helpline in helping employees reach their ET claim decisions (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Call perceived to be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important</th>
<th>Call perceived to be ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ important</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Base*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All employees considering an ET claim before call</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Those considering a claim before call AND making such a claim after call</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Those considering a claim before call AND not making such a claim but thinking about it</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Those considering a claim before call AND not making such a claim and not thinking about it</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-responses are not included in the Bases.
Note: categories 2, 3 and 4 are sub-groups of category 1.

4.3.2 Pre-Claim Conciliation (PCC)

Pre-Claim Conciliation (PCC) is a relatively new service offered by Acas and is aimed at reducing the number of Employment Tribunal claims through conciliation prior to the formal submission of an ‘ET1’ claim form. During 2009, Helpline advisers began to offer the option of PCC to callers in cases where they felt this may be appropriate. By its nature, PCC requires both parties to co-operate. New questions regarding PCC were added to the survey for wave 2 in 2009 (prior to this the service had not been widely available).
**Employment Tribunals and Pre-Claim Conciliation (Employees)**

All employees who had discussed the option of making a claim to the ET during their call to the Helpline were asked follow-up questions about Pre-Claim Conciliation. The first of these questions was: "Did the Helpline adviser suggest that you speak to an Acas conciliator about the possibility of settling your potential claim?"

- Around a third (36 per cent) of the 332 respondents to this question answered yes, that they had discussed the option during their call. This is in contrast to information taken from the Acas Data Capture System (DCS) which is completed by the adviser at the time of the call. The DCS shows that a very small number of callers (14 of 1,885 - less than one per cent) had actually discussed PCC with their adviser and had in principle accepted the offer of speaking with a conciliator. This suggests that the results from the survey question are unreliable and that respondents may have misunderstood the question. Specifically, it is likely that respondents did not understand the term ‘conciliator’. Due to the high degree of inconsistency with the DCS, no further discussion of these findings is included.

Employees and former employees who stated that they had discussed the option of speaking with a conciliator during their call were asked to state the outcome of this conversation.

- The majority (60 per cent) answered that they did not speak to an Acas conciliator, while the remaining 41 per cent stated that they had spoken to a conciliator. This includes: respondents who said they had spoken to a conciliator and decided not to take the matter further (seven per cent); those who spoke to a conciliator but the employer was not willing to discuss settling the claim (14 per cent); respondents who had negotiated with their employer through the conciliator but were not able to settle the claim (9 per cent); and those who negotiated with their employer through the conciliator and had settled the claim (12 per cent). For the reasons described above, it is likely that many respondents misunderstood the nature of PCC and the results should be treated with much caution.

**Employment Tribunals and Pre-Claim Conciliation (Employers)**

Employers who called the Helpline were asked if it was in response to concerns that one or more of their employees was considering making a claim to the Employment Tribunal.

- Less than one in ten employers (seven per cent) said that their call was in response to such concerns. This is slightly fewer than the result for wave 1 of 2009 and 2007 (12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively).

The small number of employers who were calling in response to these concerns were subsequently asked how useful their call had been in helping them to deal with the situation they were concerned about.

- Almost all (97 per cent) of these respondents regarded the call as having been very (42 per cent), or fairly (55 per cent) useful in dealing with the situation. Although these results should be regarded as indicative only given that a very small number of employers (33) answered this question.
• This small group of employers were also asked if the Helpline adviser had suggested that they speak to an Acas conciliator about the possibility of settling the employee’s potential claim (in other words, offered PCC). Around two-thirds of this group stated that they had not, while one-third agreed that they had. Due to the small number of respondents and concerns that the question was misunderstood (confirmed by inconsistencies with the Acas Data Capture System as discussed above) results should be treated as indicative at best.

• Employers who stated they had discussed the option of talking to a conciliator were asked about the outcome. Due to the very small number of respondents and concerns outlined above, the results to this question have not been included in the report.
5. SATISFACTION WITH THE HELPLINE

5.1 Overall satisfaction

All callers were asked, considering everything, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the service they had received from the Acas Helpline. A seven point scale was used to measure this which ranged from 1 (‘extremely dissatisfied’) through to 7 (‘extremely satisfied’). The distribution of responses can be seen in Figure 4.

- Overall satisfaction with the service received was very high with 95 per cent of callers stating that they were either extremely, very or fairly satisfied. This has remained stable over the past few years (93 per cent in wave 1 of 2009 and 94 per cent in both 2005 and 2007).

- Nearly four-in-ten respondents (38 per cent) stated that they were ‘extremely satisfied’ with the service received and 43 per cent were ‘very satisfied’. By adding these groups together we can say that 81 per cent of callers were ‘highly’ satisfied (either extremely or very satisfied). This is a slight improvement on wave 1 of 2009, when 75 per cent had been highly satisfied. Given the existing high levels of satisfaction this increase should be regarded as positive.

- Fourteen per cent of callers were fairly satisfied with the service and only three per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

- Callers who were dissatisfied constituted a very small minority, with only two per cent saying they were fairly, very or extremely dissatisfied. Of this group, one third (under one per cent of all callers) were highly dissatisfied (either very or extremely dissatisfied). The proportion who said they were dissatisfied had decreased from four per cent at the time of the wave 1 survey.

- Improvement in overall satisfaction levels is likely to be connected with decreased call waiting times and an increase in the proportion of callers who get through to the Helpline quickly (see Section 3.2).

- Participants in the qualitative research expressed similarly high levels of satisfaction towards the Helpline service. Often participants had low expectations prior to calling Acas – expecting the Helpline to be similar to other call centres they had bad experiences of. In these cases the Helpline had greatly exceeded their expectations and they described Acas very favourably (see Chapter 6).
To facilitate sub-group analysis a mean (average) satisfaction score has been created. The score was calculated using the seven point scale mentioned above. A caller indicating he or she was ‘extremely satisfied’ was allocated a score of seven and a caller indicating he or she was ‘extremely dissatisfied’ was allocated a score of one. A summary of mean scores by caller type can be found in Table S6 in the Supplementary Tables.

- The mean overall score for all callers was 6.11. This means that on average callers were ‘very satisfied’ with the service they received from the Acas Helpline (on the seven-point scale this was number six).
- All of the five caller types had very high mean satisfaction scores. Satisfaction was highest among employee representatives and employers (with mean scores of 6.20 and 6.18) and lowest among employees and former employees (with mean scores of 6.06 and 6.07 respectively). This variation by caller type was also observed at wave 1, although variation is very small and should not be overstated (see Table S6).

5.2 Likely re-use of the Acas Helpline

All respondents were asked if they would use the Acas Helpline again if they had other enquiries relating to employment issues:

- In general, likelihood of re-use is very high amongst Acas Helpline callers, with the large majority (97 per cent) answering that they would use it again in future. This is consistent with findings from previous years (96 per cent in wave 1 of 2009 and 97 per cent in 2007).
• Only one per cent of respondents said that they would not use the Helpline again. In fact twice as many (two per cent) stated that they didn’t know whether they would use the Helpline again or not. The findings suggest that nearly all callers would use the Helpline again or were not able to decide whether they would or not.

• Respondents from all caller types were very likely to answer yes to this question. Employer representatives answered unanimously (100 per cent) that they would use the Helpline again if necessary, while 99 per cent of employers answered yes to this question. Employees and former employees were slightly less likely to state that they would use the Helpline again (96 per cent and 95 per cent respectively). Analysis by caller type is presented in Table S7 of the Supplementary Tables.

5.3 Likelihood of recommending the Acas Helpline

Callers were also asked how likely they would be to recommend the Acas Helpline to a friend or work colleague. A five-point rating scale was used ranging from ‘very unlikely’ to ‘very likely’.

• Nearly all callers (97 per cent) stated that they were likely to recommend the Helpline, including 84 per cent who said they were very likely and 12 per cent fairly likely. This suggests a small improvement on the findings from wave 1 of 2009 and 2007 when 94 and 95 per cent respectively were likely to recommend the Helpline.

• More than eight out of ten callers (84 per cent) were very likely to recommend the Helpline (a small increase from 80 per cent at wave 1) and 12 per cent were fairly likely to do so.

• Remaining responses included two per cent who were neither likely nor unlikely to recommend the Helpline and one per cent who were unlikely to recommend the Helpline to a friend or work colleague. The proportion that were unlikely to recommend the Helpline has decreased from three per cent at wave 1.

5.4 Other sources of information

This short section looks at respondents’ access to other sources of information and contact with Acas through media other than the Helpline, including internet access, use of the Acas website and likelihood of using other Acas information sources.

5.4.1 Access to the internet

Callers were asked whether they had access to the internet. Those who did have access were asked to specify if they had this access at work, outside or work, or both:

• Access to the internet was widespread amongst callers, with 92 per cent stating that they had access. This result has been increasing slowly over time. In wave 1 of 2009 91 per cent stated that they had access, while in 2007, 87 per cent had access. Under one-in-ten respondents (eight per cent) did not have access to the internet.
• Callers were most likely to have access to the internet outside of work (75 per cent). Half of all callers (53 per cent) were able to access the internet at work.

• Almost all employers and employer representatives had access to the internet (96 per cent and 99 per cent respectively).

• Employers were considerably more likely to have internet access at work (87 per cent) rather than outside of work (56 per cent). This pattern was also present amongst employer representatives (95 per cent at work and 66 per cent outside of work).

• A lower percentage of employees, former employees and employee representatives had access to the internet (89, 89 and 91 per cent respectively). Unlike employers, employees’ internet access was most likely to be outside of work.

5.4.2 Use of the Acas website prior to the call

Callers who confirmed having access to the internet were asked if they had tried to find the answer to their enquiry on the Acas website (www.acas.org.uk) before calling the Helpline:

• Half of all callers with internet access stated that they had first checked the Acas website before calling the Helpline (50 per cent). The remaining 50 per cent had not done so. Interestingly the proportion of those looking on the Acas website before their call has reduced since wave 1 of 2009, when 59 per cent of those with access had used the website first. This may be a reaction to the shorter waiting times. In other words, as calls are being answered more promptly, it could be that fewer people are hanging up and looking on the website.

• Of the five caller types, employer representatives were the most likely to have first looked on the Acas website for an answer to their enquiry before calling (60 per cent). Employee representatives were the least likely to have done so (46 per cent). Further details can be found in Supplementary Table S8.

5.4.3 Likelihood of future use of Acas information sources

All callers were asked to indicate the likelihood of them using the Acas website and Acas publications as sources of information on employment issues in the future. Likelihood was measured using a four-point scale ranging from ‘very likely’ to ‘not at all likely’.

The Acas website

Of the two information sources, the Acas website was the most likely to be used by respondents in future:

• Excluding non-responses, over half (54 per cent) of all respondents stated that they were very likely to use the Acas website in future as a source of information on employment issues. This represents a small increase since wave 1 of 2009 and 2007, when results for both showed that 48 per cent of respondents were very likely to use the website. Just under one-third (30 per cent) thought they were fairly likely to use the Acas website in future (compared with 34 per cent in wave 1 2009 and 35 per cent in 2007). Combining the ‘very’ and ‘fairly’ likely categories – 84 per cent of all callers
considered themselves likely to use the Acas website as an information source in future.

- A minority of 12 per cent of respondents thought they were either not very, or not at all likely to use the Acas website as a source for employment information in future. This is comparable to wave 1 of 2009 and 2007 when 16 and 14 per cent (respectively) gave the equivalent response.

- A small proportion (four per cent) of respondents answered ‘don’t know’ to this question. Non-responses made up six per cent of total respondents and have been excluded from the calculations.

**Acas publications**

Compared to use of the Acas website, callers regarded themselves as being less likely to make use of Acas publications as a future source of information on employment issues:

- Excluding non-responses, one third (33 per cent) of respondents considered themselves very likely to use Acas publications. A further 28 per cent said they were fairly likely. Therefore 61 per cent of callers thought they were likely (either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’) to use Acas publications as an information source for employment issues in future. This represents an increase since wave 1 of 2009 and 2007 when 49 and 56 per cent of callers respectively indicated they were likely to use Acas publications in future.

- Three in ten respondents (29 per cent) stated that they were not likely (either not very, or not at all likely) to use Acas publications as a source of information in future.

- ‘Don’t know’ responses made up ten per cent of the callers in this case.

- Non-responses made up a relatively large proportion of total respondents (11 per cent) and have been excluded from the calculations.
6. SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the findings from the qualitative interviews and focus groups which were conducted with callers between the two waves of the survey (and before many of the service improvements had been fully instituted). Full methodological details are provided in the Technical Appendix.

The qualitative research was used to uncover factors behind callers’ views and add a level of detail and context which cannot be gained through survey findings alone. In other words, understanding why callers feel the way they do about the Helpline and their use of it. Specifically, verbatim comments and case studies offer insight into participants’ perceptions and background. The qualitative and quantitative research therefore complement each other and help to build a more complete picture of use and perceptions of the Acas Helpline.

This discussion of the focus group and depth interview findings has been included in a discrete chapter for two reasons. Firstly, much of the discussion centres on topics which are not directly covered in the surveys and therefore would not have sat comfortably amongst the earlier quantitative discussion. Secondly, separating these two methodological approaches can simplify the discussion for the reader.

Unless otherwise stated, the discussion in Chapter 6 is based purely upon findings of the qualitative research. It is important to note that, unlike the surveys, the qualitative research was deliberately biased towards less satisfied callers in order to isolate points of improvement in the Helpline service. As such opinions in this chapter may seem more negative than elsewhere in the report.

6.1 Awareness, knowledge and expectations

Awareness of Acas was gained through a number of methods, many of which have been covered in Chapter 3. Media coverage of high profile employment disputes was frequently mentioned as a method of gaining awareness.

"I heard about them a while back when there were news strikes and their name came up then." (Employee Representative)

Some participants (generally employer callers) said that they had been aware of, and had often used Acas for many years.

6.2 Awareness of other Acas services

Aside from the website, awareness of other (non-Helpline) services was fairly limited. Conciliation and arbitration services were mentioned a number of times by employees, most notably by those who had made use of them through the Employment Tribunal process. Knowledge about the conciliation and arbitration services was limited.

As with general awareness, employers were more likely to be aware of other Acas services than employees, with one employer in a large company having made use of training workshops, e-learning, publications, codes of practice and mediation and arbitration services as well as the Helpline and website more generally.
6.2.1 Associations and purpose of Acas

Associations with Acas (the organisation as a whole) were examined by asking in the focus groups ‘when I say Acas, what words and pictures come to mind?’. ‘Advice’ was raised almost immediately in both groups. Other words associated with Acas were ‘help’, ‘representation’, ‘fairness’, ‘direction’ and ‘workers rights’, as well as ‘a known body which you hear about all the time in the press’ and ‘the sound of the nice man’s voice on the telephone’.

Participants in one focus group were asked if they knew what the acronym Acas stood for. None of the participants were able to answer this in full, however one employee was aware of the first two letters, “Advisory and Conciliation”.

The vast majority were aware that the Helpline was targeted at both employees and employers. Employees who were not connected to a union were perceived by some to be one of the core target user groups:

“People who are looking for advice who aren’t connected to any of the unions in their profession” (Non-professional employee representative)

6.2.2 Expectations

Prior to calling the Helpline, expectations varied between participants. Those with low expectations had expected the Helpline to be similar to other call centres or government services such as British Telecom, the Home Office or the Department for Work and Pensions and as such, to be a fairly poor service:

“I was expecting a bored call centre person keen to get you off the phone” (Employee)

“I wasn’t expecting professional, I wasn’t expecting informed. I was expecting to be fobbed off, but hey they were the only game in town so I thought I would give it a try” (Employee)

Those with high expectations had either received a positive recommendation from a colleague or friend or were so desperate that they pinned their last remaining hopes on Acas to solve their problem:

“I thought they were going to be my saviour” (Employee)

“My expectations were very big because I was so desperate... I needed an organisation to help me.” (Employee)

Expectations varied in degree but tended to fall under two main areas; advocacy and confirmation / reassurance.

Advocacy

A number of employees who had called had initially expected the adviser to act as an advocate in their case, or someone willing to give them direct advice on how to advance their own goals around their employment dispute:

“I thought that Acas would sort of pick up the ball and run with it for me but it appears that that is not the case.” (Employee)

This was also linked to an expectation among many employees that they would receive a definitive answer to their question and therefore come away with a clear direction in which to proceed.
"I was asking whether or not I had been treated unfairly but, I don’t know, I think was expecting them to say either yes you have or no you haven’t. Whereas the answer I got was, well here are your rights, and then they read out my rights. I then had to sit and think, well, is that the case for myself? I was given guidance rather than a straight answer.” (Employee)

“All I want is for Acas to say if I’ve got a case.” (Employee)

“It was as if they gave an answer and it was up to your interpretation of how you understood the answer. It wasn’t black and white.” (Employee)

Case study 1: strong advocacy expectation

- Manual labourer being paid holiday pay in with wages (roll-over holiday) decided to investigate whether this was illegal or not and how to change his contract
- He contacted DWP, who referred him to Acas
- He used the website to search for an email address or office to talk about the issue in person
- He expected Acas to mediate on his behalf and gave them his employer’s name and contact details
- Acas suggested that he speak to his employer and that, if this did not prove successful, to call again
- He interpreted this as a ‘brush off’ rather than as advice
- He spoke to his employer and the matter was resolved efficiently and quickly

Confirmation and reassurance

The word ‘confirmation’ arose several times when participants spoke about their expectations of the Helpline. Where callers had sought advice from other sources, including the Acas website, they wanted confirmation that their interpretation of the legalities was correct and that these legalities applied to them:

"I just wanted confirmation that I had a case.” (Employee)

"You just need that last push to make you certain that what you’re doing is the right thing.” (Employee)

“I wanted reassurance because I’m not a very confident person.” (Employee)

This was particularly true for employers, who were generally more experienced and often were only calling for a second opinion before taking action on a matter:

“I tend to have an idea of what I’m thinking they’re going to say and it’s confirmation of my own views that I’m looking for... getting their view on my view.” (Employer)
6.3 Usage, motivations and barriers towards using the Helpline

6.3.1 Employee use of the Helpline

Employees called the Helpline regarding various topics, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Interestingly, many employees had not contacted Acas until the situation had worsened significantly. Many had sought to resolve the situation in various other ways before deciding to call the Helpline by:

- Talking to friends and family
- Asking work colleagues for advice
- Confronting their employer
- Consulting their union (if they had one)
- Consulting the views of a solicitor or lawyer
- Contacting another organisation – DWP, Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Using the Acas website

Acas was often ‘the last resort’ in a chain of events to try to resolve the situation. However, Acas was considered to be a useful service in the beginning of a dispute and some wished they had been aware of the Helpline earlier:

“It was for the initial stages I needed them for, I needed to know whether my case was strong enough before I went off and started to spend money on a solicitor.”

(Employee)

6.3.2 Employer use of the Helpline

The Acas Helpline was often used by employers who did not have a Human Resources (HR) department as a substitute for such a specialism. Where an HR department or specialist was in place it could be seen as one of the key tools available for dealing with HR issues. The Helpline seemed to be particularly important for small employers without a dedicated HR department:

“Acas is invaluable. We have had lots of HR issues. Basically the last quarter our financial consultant left the company so I have had lots of HR questions and nobody else to ask.”

(Employer – small organisation)

“The way I look at it is that it’s an HR department”

(Employer – small organisation)

Employers in larger organisations tended to be using the Helpline for extra reassurance and to check their understanding of legal issues.

More broadly, the other services that Acas offers were welcomed by some employers whereby e-learning, training courses and the website formed an intrinsic part of HR
training within the organisation. The combination of the Helpline and website filled a
gap in employer support that had previously been filled by commercial organisations:

“I’ve directed a colleague onto this for her training and she will then be
able to give advice.” (Employer – large organisation)

6.3.3 Motivations to calling the Helpline

Motivations for calling the Helpline were fairly predictable and are related to fulfilling
the positive expectations discussed in Section 6.2.2. ‘Help’, ‘advice’ and
‘confirmation’ were mentioned by many participants. Some participants described the
need to make a decision (particularly with regards to a legal issue), or a change in
circumstance as triggers for actually picking up the telephone and making a call to
Acas.

Several employees discussed their motivations for pursuing the issue rather than
letting it go. Calling the Helpline was seen as an early step in taking the matter
further. Clearly individuals were motivated by a desire to resolve the issue or dispute
in a fair, legal and satisfactory manner. In some cases this had nothing to do with
money or continued employment, but simply a sense of injustice and associated
anger based on the belief that they had been unfairly treated.

6.3.4 Barriers to calling the Helpline

Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness was of course a barrier to calling the Helpline for both employers
and employees. Participants thought many who could benefit from the service were
unaware of one of two things: Firstly, they could be unaware that the service existed
at all; or secondly, they may have heard of Acas, but may not know what Acas is or
what services it provides. In either case this might prevent a call being made when
contact with Acas may have been beneficial.

Heightened state of emotion

Just as emotion could be a motivating factor for calling the Helpline, it could also be
a barrier in that potential callers might feel too concerned or distressed to take
action. In some cases therefore a non-professional representative (e.g. family
member) had called on behalf of the person experiencing the situation:

“She was just too close to it all. She was too upset to make the call.”
(Employee representative)

Not wanting to ‘rock the boat’

Employees described having experienced a real fear of starting a process that could
lead to escalating the situation. Some mentioned having been worried that this could
lead to them losing their job or making the situation worse for their colleagues.
There was also a sense of apprehension about having to be a spokesperson or simply
a fear of conflict.

Several times throughout interviews the phrase ‘don’t want to rock the boat’ was
used by employees to describe a barrier to calling the Helpline. Discussing an issue
with an employer was seen as difficult and having the potential to make the situation worse. Calling the Acas Helpline could be considered the first step in this process:

“The other lads don’t want to do anything cos they don’t want to rock the boat. I was the same.” (Employee)

“I think they could get their back up a little bit, thinking that he or she knows what they want to find out.” (Employee representative)

**Lack of confidence**

It was generally acknowledged that it took a certain level of assertiveness, confidence and initiative to be committed to resolving the problem and subsequently call the Helpline.

Representatives echoed this and further added that some people felt they lacked the ability to grapple with and understand the information that would be discussed during the call.

“Employment law… it’s scary; they say will you talk to them because I won’t understand what they tell me” (Employee Representative)

**Waiting time**

Waiting time was considered a large barrier to using the Helpline. The experience of being put on hold when calling was widespread and was often considered the most (and sometimes only) negative aspect of the Helpline service. However by the time the second wave of the survey was conducted call waiting times had reduced substantially (see Section 3.2) and as such waiting time is now less of a barrier.

**Lack of time**

The lack of available time or ability to make a call to the Helpline was also seen as a barrier by some employees. This was particularly the case for those with busy or manual jobs and those who had no access to the telephone during the day. This was compounded by long waiting times, which increased the amount of time that had to be set aside to make the call.

“If you’re out fixing Mrs Jones toilet then you can’t be sitting on the phone for half an hour trying to get hold of Acas.” (Employee representative)

Many employees were uncomfortable contacting the Helpline using their work telephone, or during work time. The main reason for this was that the subject matter was sensitive and related to work; therefore they needed privacy which was not generally available in the workplace. The solution for many employees was to make a call on their mobile telephone during a break, or before or after work. Another way to overcome the barrier was for a representative to make the phone call on behalf of the employee as described below:

“She could never make a personal call in the office … the office hours that she was working were the office hours that Acas are open so it was obvious that I should do it and have peace of mind about it … nobody could walk in.” (Employee representative)

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25 As mentioned elsewhere in the report the Helpline opening hours have been extended. From April 2009 the Helpline was open until 8pm Monday to Friday and for four hours on Saturday mornings. The extended hours came into effect after the sample of potential respondents was collected for the qualitative work, so comments relate to the service provided in January 2009.
**Call costs**

Call costs were described as a barrier by several employees. This was linked to the waiting time, which compounded the cost for callers, particularly callers who needed to make several calls or for those whose mobile provider charged high rates to 0845 numbers.

"I waited sometimes 20, 25 minutes to actually get through to speak to somebody ... Because I was ringing from my mobile the bill was horrendous ... It’s not a free service as such because you’re paying for the phone line. To other people ... they wouldn’t be able to afford to just ring them to make one call." (Employee)

**6.4 Experience of the Acas Helpline**

Not surprisingly, the caller’s experience was often dominated by whether Acas was in a position to help them or not, and whether the information gleaned through calling Acas would lead to a positive or negative outcome overall. Some callers were simply disgruntled because Acas was not able to solve their problem. In a few cases, Acas referred the caller to a third party and the third party was unable to help which further exacerbated the caller’s distress:

"She directed me to the CAB so I felt a bit cut adrift." (Employee)

The call experience was also directly related to callers’ original expectations – whether low or high – as well as the role they had expected Acas to play. Simply put, those with a low expectations usually had a very positive experience. It is important to reiterate here that the qualitative work was deliberately weighted towards those with more negative views and that, as evidenced in Section 5.1, callers overall satisfaction with the Helpline was very high.

It cannot be overstated that the reason for calling Acas had usually caused the caller significant distress and turmoil – especially the employee. They arrived at the call with strong emotional needs.

**6.4.1 Emotional needs**

A number of callers recalled being particularly distressed over their reason for calling Acas – the associated stress of their dispute having had adverse effects on their health and wellbeing. They recalled having felt anything from 'stressed', 'lonely' and 'shocked', to 'frightened' at the time of making the Acas call. They described being in a very vulnerable and highly emotive state. This in turn impacted on their level of need for advocacy and support.

For some, this heightened emotional state directly affected their ability to converse, to interact, to be articulate and to think clearly. Consistent with the quantitative findings (see Section 3.5), in most cases, the Helpline adviser was found to be patient:

"To be honest, the lady spent a long time with me talking me through the process, but it’s a very very confusing process. She was very good and very patient with me going off on a tangent...” (Employee)

"I was in a very dark place at that time... “ (Employee)
Case study 2: Emotional needs

- Employee dismissed on the grounds of reduced capacity. Her physical health had deteriorated and she had been on sick leave for some time before dismissal.
- She was highly stressed and depressed at the time of the call:
  - "I was actually being signed off sick by the GP for depression. So, I was feeling very low, very down, feeling worthless really – very low self esteem."
- The discussion with the adviser was seen to have had a positive effect on her emotional state following the call. She referred to the adviser as having been “helpful”, “friendly” and “lovely” and found the information provided to be practical and helpful in moving forward with her case:
  - “I felt quite relieved actually. I felt a bit more settled in myself... it made me feel a bit better about myself.”
- The caller found the service to be highly satisfactory and said that she would recommend the Helpline to others.

6.4.2 The positive aspects of the Helpline experience

The characteristics of the Helpline adviser contributed to a positive experience in almost all cases. This is explored in more detail in Sections 3.5 and 6.4.4.

The protocol or process followed by the adviser was considered as both appropriate and useful. Callers described the adviser listening, asking questions, helping to construct letters and referring them to websites and organisations that could be helpful. For some who were referred to another organisation, this proved to be very useful and they welcomed the information and the referral:

"They dictated a letter to me that she needed to write to put forward to her employers and problem solved." (Employee Representative)

Furthermore, the length of the call allocated for the caller was appreciated, with many feeling valued that the adviser was dedicating so much time (15-25 minutes) to their call. This is consistent with findings from the survey discussed in Section 3.6, where the large majority of callers regarded the length of call as ‘about right’.

Both employees and employers commended the Helpline for being ostensibly a free service and compared the advice favourably to commercial organisations or solicitors.

6.4.3 The negative aspects of the Helpline experience

Although often the only negative comment made, the length of the wait to get through to an Acas adviser contributed to poor call experience. Surprisingly however, this frustration was often dissipated by the skill of the call adviser and lead to an overall good experience:
“The only bad thing I can say and it’s a huge bad thing is you keep phoning them and you’re lucky if you get through in a weeks time.”
(Employee Representative)

“Service impeccable, reaching the service, atrocious.” (Employer)

Long wait times were also seen as inconvenient, time consuming and costly. Another consequence of a long call was an increased likelihood among employees to ask representatives to call on their behalf. However, as discussed in Section 3.2, through improvements to the Helpline service in 2009, wait times have reduced and therefore the negative impacts mentioned are likely to have been alleviated.

A few isolated cases of Helpline advisers giving incomplete or contradictory advice were mentioned. This is discussed further in Section 6.4.4 below.

In some cases callers had been referred on to another organisation or to another part of Acas. Not all callers were happy about being referred elsewhere by the adviser. In a few cases, they were upset that Acas could not be more helpful and supportive and they felt as if they had been given the ‘brush off’:

“They said they don’t get involved until you put in the E1 form or something and it sounded like they wanted to just fob me off and get rid of me...they weren’t backing me up. I just wanted them to tell me that I had a case.” (Employee)

“I was hoping I would get some back up but they directed me to the union – they have not been helpful to me at all.” (Employee)

6.4.4 The Acas adviser

Helpline advisers were generally felt to be the best part of the call experience and respondents praised the advisers on many occasions. These findings confirm the opinions expressed in the survey as discussed in Section 3.5. A number of key characteristics were identified as being particularly good:

- Patient and not intimidating
- Good listening skills
- Interested and engaged, asked questions
- Intelligent
- Supportive
- Polite and professional
- Clear accent
- Good English skills

“I was speaking to someone that was professional...and informed.”
(Representative - employee)

“From the start they put me at ease immediately and assured me that everything was confidential and to take my time and not feel rushed...I laid the problem out to them...they asked me a few questions and then they gave me the answer... the way to proceed.” (Employee)
"They were friendly and reassuring and didn’t make me feel inferior – they came across like they were a friend giving advice..." (Employee)

"They take you through on a step by step basis which is what you need.” (Employee)

"They are very quick to grasp what the problem is... you start your story and they immediately know." (Employer – small organisation)

"They must stress people skills when they hire.” (Employer – large organisation)

Generally where someone had spoken to more than one adviser they usually commented that they had received a good service from both or all advisers – suggesting that their positive experience was not the result of a ‘one-off’ good adviser.

The idea of increased continuity was suggested by several participants. Many felt that the service could be enhanced by offering one point of contact – with the same adviser being available to deal with all specific queries relating to a case. In a few cases, this had been offered to an employee or employer and it was much appreciated.

When asked to suggest service improvements, some callers felt that they might have had a better experience if they had been able to express themselves better to the Acas adviser. They queried whether the advisers could be better at seeking out more information and asking the right questions from distressed callers. This was deemed an important part of the adviser’s role:

"If you throw out a great lump of a situation it’s very difficult for the Acas adviser." (Employee)

Although most callers felt the advisers were knowledgeable, there was one instance of an employee feeling that the Helpline adviser was limited in their knowledge (specifically about redundancy during maternity leave):

“To be honest, I did feel particularly with the first person that they were just reading from a manual as opposed to giving advice. I know it’s a huge job that they have with so much employment legislation but I felt she obviously knew which chapter to go to but I felt that it was just read out” (Employee)

It is important to reiterate here that participants in the qualitative work were selected from those whose satisfaction with the service was below average. Comments made above therefore do not represent Helpline callers as a whole.

6.4.5 Impartiality

Prior to calling the Helpline, many employees confessed that they thought Acas would get involved in the dispute on their behalf and fight for them against the employer. They wanted and expected the adviser to empathise with them. This is directly linked to expectations of advocacy discussed in Section 6.2.2.
Nevertheless, most callers were aware that the Acas Helpline was a service for both employees and employers. After calling the Helpline, most were clear that Acas would not take sides and that the Helpline adviser would provide them with facts rather than opinions:

“I think they are impartial because when you tell them your story and they listen and then they hear what you have to say and then they say these are your rights. This is what you are entitled to.”
(Employee)

“They represent both sides so they cannae take sides.”
(Employee)

“You get both sides of the scenario; they are not just there for the employer.”
(Employer – small organisation)

“Both times I have rung they have given me both points of view from employer and employee so they have said yes, you can do this but remember the employee can do X.”
(Employer – large organisation)

It was generally felt that Acas was equally supportive of employers and employees, but there was a feeling that employees may use the Helpline more than employers:

“Legislation has more recently shifted towards the employee but Acas are not on any side.” (Employee Representative)

### 6.4.6 Employment Tribunal claimants and avoiders

Callers who were considering a claim, or were making a claim to the Employment Tribunal varied slightly from the rest of the sample in that they tended to have a greater need for support and ongoing contact and communication with the Helpline. These callers suggested that Acas should contact them during their claim process to update them with the claim’s progress. The suggestion of a named contact and a reference number was particularly relevant for this group.

Claimants and claim avoiders recalled that the adviser had either gently pointed them in the direction of the website to get ET information or had explained the process to them. Information on timing was identified as being a particularly important aspect and this was something that the Acas adviser could have been more explicit about: How long is the window for making a claim? How long will the claim process take? What are the key dates within the claim process?
Case study 3: ET Claimant avoider

- An unfair dismissal case that was settled immediately prior to reaching the Employment Tribunal (ET).
- The claimant had used Acas previously as an employer when working in the payroll department.
- She called to get confirmation of her rights. The adviser provided her with an email address which she used to request a call back. This led to her dealing with the same adviser throughout the life of the claim. This level of personal contact was commended, appreciated and said to have been much needed.
- She contacted Acas after she had been dismissed because she thought they would only help at this stage in the dispute.
- The possibility of an ET arose naturally as part of the discussion with the adviser.
- The adviser’s input was mainly in terms of how the process of an ET would work – what forms the caller needed to use, when and how to inform her employer of the matters at issue, and the timescales for each step of the process.
- Although the caller felt strongly that she should go to an ET before calling (and ultimately did go to an ET) she judged the call as having been very important in helping her reach a final conclusion – since without Acas’ impartial viewpoint she would have been less confident that she was doing the right thing. The call was seen as valuable for this very reason:
  - "It was a lot of help you know. You just need to know that you’re doing the right thing... going down the right route. I thought you’re not getting away with this. I’m doing the right thing, I’m taking you all the way!"
- The caller felt there was nothing that Acas could have done to influence her decision on this matter. The advice given confirmed to her that she had a strong case. She also felt that, without the advice, she would have been unclear about the practicalities of going to an ET and certain procedural timings.

6.5 Alternative communication channels

Acas is alert to potential alternative communication channels that might supplement its telephone Helpline. As such, a number of options were presented in focus groups and depth interviews and the findings are discussed below.

It was generally acknowledged that the default and ideal communication channel was by telephone and that alternative channels would need to be in addition to, rather than instead of this medium. A great deal of value was placed on the benefit of talking a problem through which could lead to a deeper level of enquiry, which in turn helped to get to the root of the problem:

“It's nice to talk to someone... when you talk to someone they sometimes ask you a question that prompts you to think. In an email you haven't got that back and forth – they respond just to your question.” (Employee)
The option of communicating with Acas **face-to-face** was suggested by some, especially older participants and employees working in more manual occupations, for whom face-to-face represents their preferred channel:

“If they’d have said you can pop down to the office, I’d have turned up. I’m more of a face-to-face man – this is the longest I’ve been on the phone.” (Employee)

The idea of electronic communication was also welcomed and was deemed by some to be essential – especially if the waiting times for telephone remained the same. Whereas some favoured email, the more IT-literate participants preferred ‘instant messaging’ over email for its perceived speed.

However, a concern about anonymity was raised generally given that an email address or alias (on a messaging service) might detract from an enquiry being completely anonymous, which was important for some participants.

### 6.5.1 Email

There was strong preference for email to be available as an additional communication channel. Some were surprised that this was not already offered and had searched the Acas website looking for relevant email addresses. A number of benefits were highlighted:

- The construction process aiding clearer articulation
- The speed of making an enquiry
- The convenience of making enquiry at any time
- The convenience of not having to physically wait for a reply
- The ability to receive tailored written advice that can be re-read, saved and forwarded on

### 6.5.2 Web-based instant messaging

Those familiar with the concept of ‘instant messaging’ were very favourable of this as a channel. They liked the idea of being able to get an instant response and compared it to the telephone in that it allowed for more of a dialogue than traditional email and therefore deeper enquiry:

“That would be really good because sometimes it’s hard to get across what you want to say – typing is easier – if it’s there in black and white so there is no misunderstanding.” (Employer – large organisation)

### 6.5.3 Discussion Forum

Both employees and employers welcomed the idea of having discussion forums as a way to passively obtain information related to their own situation. They reflected that this could also be a much needed supportive environment where employees could give advice and support to other employees in similar situations:

“I’ve looked at the CIPD website and I’ve not posted a question but I get ideas from looking at the answers.” (Employer – large organisation)
For some of those less familiar with how discussion forums operate, a distasteful association was drawn to internet ‘chat rooms’:

“'I'm not into 'chat rooms’ if you know what I mean... no offence to you but they have chat rooms for all sorts don’t they!” (Employee)

Again, anonymity was raised as a potential concern. There was apprehension among employees that their own employer could be using the forum and so deduce their identity:

“How do you know your boss isn’t using it and logging in?” (Employee)

### 6.5.4 SMS Text Messaging

This was rejected as a potential way to communicate with Acas. Although portable and convenient, a text was not deemed appropriate to convey the seriousness and length of the enquiry. Employers commented that this was not appropriate as they were not supplied with work mobile phones and this would be at their cost:

“It takes me all day to write a text... you can’t convey what you need to.” (Employee)

### 6.6 Optimising the Acas experience

The Helpline adviser helped to make the Acas experience a positive one in a number of cases, despite callers’ experience of long waiting times. Participants concluded that the service was good and that – aside from correcting the call wait – there was little else that required improvement. Throughout the depth interviews and focus groups respondents made a variety of positive statements about the Helpline service more broadly:

“I would definitely use them again if I needed to, and I would advise other people to as well.” (Employee)

“I would definitely recommend Acas to anybody who’s got a problem.” (Employee)

“It’s a wonderful service!” (Employee)

“I’ve always received professional advice from somebody who’s obviously knowledgeable about the area.” (Employer)

“Everything that I have asked Acas on the Helpline, they have informed us correctly and in full.” (Employer)

There was some discussion about possible enhancements for making the call-waiting routing more sophisticated, and streamlining such as splitting the Helpline by subject or caller type. On probing, a number of other suggestions were made on how to improve the service:
Continuity: a designated contact person

For those with queries or problems that could result in a number of calls, it was suggested that having one named adviser to correspond with would be useful:

“If I had another question I could just ring back and speak to that person.” (Employee)

Promotion of Helpline

A number of employees felt that they had stumbled across the Helpline too late in the course of their dispute. Furthermore it was felt that Acas as an organisation was not well-promoted. Suggestions for raising the profile included various forms of advertising, posters or pamphlets in the workplace, newsletters (both postal and email), and newspaper, radio and television advertising. These suggestions came largely from participants who had very positive views of the Acas Helpline and wanted others in their position to receive the same benefit:

“I don’t think it’s advertised enough, that it’s there as a Helpline. When it first happened I didn’t know what to do and searched and trailed the internet. But not everyone has the time or access to the internet to do that.” (Employee)

However it was inferred that, in raising awareness, the Helpline would become more in demand and this would increase call waiting times.

Transparent promotion of Helpline remit

To manage expectations, some participants felt that clearer communication regarding what the Helpline service was about and how it could and could not help would mitigate against employees expecting tailored help or advocacy. This may also aid in reducing call volumes.

Broadening the service

Some participants wanted Acas to play a bigger role in their situation and were looking for more of an advocate. Those with more complicated disputes or ongoing problems and, particularly those going through a tribunal claim, wanted Acas to at the very least remain in ongoing contact with them.

Employers were keen for Acas to extend its training courses, to offer courses in a wider variety of locations and update and expand its e-learning facility.

Broadening the communication channels

Participants felt that alternative channels would help make the Acas experience more convenient and provide a much needed second route for contacting Acas.
Strategies to help the caller

Finally, in order to deal with callers’ heightened emotions, there was a sense that Acas should think about the kinds of questions that best enable distressed callers to ‘tell their own story’ and so obtain the advice they need.
The research included both quantitative and qualitative elements. The bulk of this appendix is concerned with the quantitative surveys - a separate description of the qualitative method is provided at the end of the discussion. The appendix provides details of how the surveys were administered. The surveys used a mixed methodology approach – with a postal survey supplemented by an online survey. All research was carried out by TNS Social Research.

A. Quantitative Methodology

As described in the introduction, the survey was carried out in two separate waves:

- **Wave 1** – callers to the Helpline in January 2009
- **Wave 2** – callers to the Helpline in October 2009

**Postal survey**

The survey was conducted as a postal survey with three reminders, including two letter reminders and one ‘full-pack’ reminder which included a questionnaire. One standard questionnaire was used with routing instructions to ensure it was suitable for all types of caller. The final postal questionnaire for wave 2 of the research has been appended to this report in the section marked ‘Research Tools’. The wave 1 questionnaire has not been included as this is almost identical.

**Online survey**

The survey was also offered online. The online version of the questionnaire was identical to the postal survey but had the added benefit of automated routing to ensure that respondents only answered those questions which were relevant to them. There were three reminders, including two email reminders and one ‘full-pack’ postal reminder which included a paper version of the questionnaire. The final postal reminder was used to maximise response among those who had asked to take part online but who had not checked their email regularly.

**Questionnaire design**

A number of inputs were used to design the questionnaires. The previous surveys from 2007 and 2005 were used as the basis for the survey. This ensured comparability of question wording and response categories for many of the questions. In addition, TNS met with the project team at Acas to discuss the broad objectives of the survey and to consider areas of enquiry. TNS also conducted a small number of cognitive telephone interviews with callers to the Helpline in early January 2009. Following these interviews a final questionnaire was agreed between TNS and Acas.

**TNS Helpline**

The letters and emails inviting callers to take part in the survey included a free phone Helpline number and email address which customers could contact if they did not want to take part in the research or who had a question about the survey. Those that contacted TNS were removed from the sample.

At both waves the number of opt outs was relatively small (less than 5 per cent of all selected callers).
Prize draw
To encourage response, everyone who completed a questionnaire (either on paper or online) was entered into a prize draw. At the end of fieldwork one respondent was selected at random and was sent a cheque for £500. This procedure was repeated for both waves.

Sample Design
At both waves a sample of callers to the Acas Helpline was generated by advisers over a one-week period (January and October 2009). During sample collection weeks the Helpline Data Capture System (DCS) was programmed to randomly select 60 per cent of callers (three in every five) to take part in the survey. Those who were selected by the Helpline DCS were asked by the adviser if they would be willing to take part in a survey about the service they had received.

Callers who agreed to take part in the survey were offered the options of completing the survey on paper and returning it in the post or of completing it online. The advisers collected postal and email addresses of everyone who agreed to take part in the survey.

Wave 1
A total of 12,050 customers called the Helpline during the sample building week. Of these, the Helpline DCS selected 7,150 to be asked by advisers to take part in the survey. In turn 4,202 callers agreed to take part in the research (representing a cooperation rate of 59 per cent). The majority of those who agreed to take part requested a postal survey. From the 4,202 callers who agreed to take part, TNS selected a sub-sample of 4,000 with the intention of interviewing 2,000 respondents (i.e. a target response of 50 per cent).

From the potential sample of 4,202, TNS selected all callers from each of the nine smaller offices (Birmingham, Bury St Edmunds, Cardiff, Fleet, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Nottingham). This constituted 1,973 callers in total. The remaining 2,027 were selected randomly from those who had called the Bristol, Glasgow and Newcastle offices.

Wave 2
A total of 15,503 customers called the Helpline during the sample building week. Of these, the Helpline DCS randomly selected 9,165 to be asked by advisers to take part in the survey. In turn 5,538 callers agreed to take part in the research (representing a cooperation rate of 59 per cent). The majority of those who agreed to take part requested a postal survey (3,742) while 1,796 preferred to take part online. From the 5,538 callers who agreed to take part, TNS selected a sub-sample of 4,000 with the intention of interviewing 2,000 respondents (i.e. a target response of 50 per cent).

From the potential sample of 5,538 TNS selected all callers from two of the smaller offices (Fleet and Bury St. Edmunds) with the aim of trying to achieve 100 responses

26 Although the call management software was set to select three in five callers due to a minor malfunction in the system on the first Monday of the sample collection week for Wave 2 (5 October 2009) the final sample selection ratio was marginally below this target. Analysis of Acas management information indicates that this had no significant effect on the sampling procedure or reliability of the findings.
from each. This constituted 501 callers in total. The remaining 3,499 were selected randomly from those who had called one of the other 10 offices.

Figure A below provides a breakdown of the sampling process.

**Figure A – Breakdown of sample exercise**

- **c. Calls sampled (1 week)**
  - Sampled in a ratio of 3/5*

- **Selected callers**
  - c.60% co-operation rate

- **Callers agree to take part**
  - 4,000 selected per wave

- **Select sub-sample (assuming response of 50%)**
  - 50% response rate

**COMPLETE INTERVIEWS (response of 50%)**

* The call management software was set to select three in five callers to the Helpline to be asked to take part in the survey. Due to a minor malfunction in the system the final sample selection ratio was marginally below this target.

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**Response rates**

**Wave 1**

From an initial sample of 4,000 a total of 2,018 interviews were achieved (an overall response rate of 50.5 per cent). The response varied for the postal and online elements of the survey. From an initial postal sample a response of 51.3 per cent was achieved and from an initial online sample a response of 48.6 per cent was achieved.
Wave 2
From an initial sample of 4,000 a total of 1,885 interviews were achieved (an overall response rate of 47.1 per cent). Again, the response varied for the postal and online elements of the survey. From an initial postal sample a response of 53.2 per cent was achieved and from an initial online sample a response of 34.2 per cent was achieved.

Sample comparisons
To ensure the final sample of respondents was representative of callers more widely, the characteristics were compared against the wider population. This analysis involved comparing characteristics collected in the DCS across three groups; the achieved sample (respondents to the survey), those who agreed to take part and all of the callers during the sample week. The figures in Table A below are for wave 2 only but similar analysis was carried out at both waves:

Wave 1
- All 12,050 callers who used the Helpline during the sample-building week.
- The 4,202 callers who agreed to take part in the survey when asked by an adviser

Wave 2
- All 15,503 callers who used the Helpline during the sample-building week.
- The 5,538 callers who agreed to take part in the survey when asked by an adviser

These comparisons are presented in Table A below. The final sample was very similar in make-up to both of these – indicating that the sample is broadly representative of all callers to the Helpline and that any selection or non-response bias is negligible. This is true for both waves 1 and 2.
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<th>Table A. Sample comparisons</th>
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<td><strong>Achieved sample %</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reason for call</strong></td>
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<td>Absences, Sickness and Stress</td>
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<td>Discipline, Dismissal and Grievance</td>
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<td>Diversity and Discrimination</td>
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<td>Maternity, Paternity and Adoption</td>
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* Note: Bases vary for some of these measures as not all information is available for all callers. Where data is incomplete the percentages are based on the total for which data is available.

All percentages are based on information collected by Acas advisers at the time of the call rather than as collected in the survey. This is to ensure like-for-like comparisons on each measure.
Weighting
At both waves, a further comparison was made between the sample of respondents and all callers to the Helpline during the month in which they had been sample (January and October 2009). Comparisons for both waves showed the profile of respondents to be very similar to all callers during the sampling period. As the achieved samples closely matched the profile of callers more widely, no weighting was applied to the data. All findings in the report are based on unweighted data.

Effect of completion method – testing for ‘mode effects’
For both waves of research respondents were given the option of completing the survey on paper or online. Of the 3,903 callers who took part across the two waves of research 2,683 asked to be sent a paper questionnaire and 1,220 expressed a preference for taking part online (the equivalent of 69 and 31 per cent respectively). During fieldwork, to encourage response, a mixture of postal and email (online) reminders were used allowing respondents to switch from one mode to the other. Primarily this was done to avoid respondent fatigue.

At the end of fieldwork 78 per cent of all respondents had completed on paper (3,046 across both waves) and 22 per cent online (857). On balance this indicates that between 350 and 400 callers who initially elected to complete online eventually switched to the paper version.

This short section compares the profiles of online and paper respondents to evaluate and assess the extent of bias between the two completion methods. Analysis has also been carried out to see if completion method affects responses to key survey measures but this does not appear to be the case. For example, there is no evidence that online respondents were more or less satisfied with the service they received overall than were postal respondents.

Table B: Demographic profile by completion method (paper of online)
Looking at gender and age the profile of callers that completed the survey online is remarkably similar to the profile of those that completed on paper. There are some differences between the two groups when looking at age but there is no consistent trend across the two waves of the research. For instance at wave 1 older people (aged 60 and over) were relatively unlikely to complete online (as we might expect) but this difference was not present for the wave 2 survey. On balance, there were slightly more respondents aged between 25 and 49 who completed online compared with paper but this is most likely related to the differences by caller type (see later discussion) rather than age per se. There is no evidence that gender is associated with choice of completion method.

Table C presents analysis of caller type and call subject by completion method. Looking at caller type, employers (and employer representatives) appear to favour online completion more than employees and employee representatives. For wave 1, nearly half (42 per cent) of online completions came from employers compared with 28 per cent of postal completions. While this difference had decreased by wave 2 it was still present, suggesting that the online option was more attractive to employers than employees. As shown in Table C, there is no evidence of a bias by call subject – the call subject profile was very similar for both online and postal completions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of caller</th>
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<td>Postal</td>
<td>Online</td>
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<td>Employee</td>
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<th>Call subject</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absences, Sickness and Stress</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, Dismissal and Grievance</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and Discrimination</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Friendly Policies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday and Working Time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, Paternity and Adoption</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancies, Lay Offs and Business Transfers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages and NMW</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis by time and day of call (extended vs. standard hours)

As described in the main body of the report, during 2009 the opening hours for the Helpline were extended, allowing callers to call after 6pm on weekdays and on Saturdays (herein 'extended hours'). These extended hours were in operation by the time the sample was selected for wave 2, but not in time for wave 1 or the qualitative fieldwork. This section presents analysis relating to time of call, including day of the week, time of day and specifically whether the call was made during extended or standard hours.

As shown in Table D, nearly all callers (98 per cent) taking part across both waves of the survey called during standard hours, with 41 per cent calling on a weekday morning and 57 per calling on a weekday afternoon. Just 2 per cent of callers called during extended hours, with most of these calls taking place after 6pm on a weekday rather than on Saturday.

Table D: Callers during standard and extended hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of call</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard hours (am)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard hours (pm)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended hours (evening)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended hours (Saturday)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Less than 1%

In view of the fact that extended hours calls generally last longer, Table E looks at perceived length of call by standard and extended hours. Across both waves a large majority of all callers felt the length of their call was about right and there was little variation in perception during standard and extended hours (94 per cent and 91 per cent respectively).

Table E: Perceived length of call during standard and extended hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived length of call</th>
<th>Standard hours</th>
<th>Extended hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too long</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too short</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Less than 1%

Given that call volumes and associated queue lengths are smallest during extended hours, Table F presents a breakdown of how quickly callers got through to the Helpline and satisfaction levels with call waiting time, split by standard and extended hours.
Table F: Variation in call waiting by standard and extended hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether got through on first attempt</th>
<th>Standard hours %</th>
<th>Extended hours %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through almost immediately after being held in a queue</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through reasonably promptly after being held in queue</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through eventually after being held in a queue for a long time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - I was waiting too long so I hung up and called again later</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with waiting time</th>
<th>Standard hours %</th>
<th>Extended hours %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, differences in perception of and satisfaction with call waiting time are limited. On balance callers during extended hours were slightly more likely to say they either got through immediately or reasonably promptly than callers during standard hours (81 per cent compared with 71 per cent). Callers during extended hours were also slightly more likely to be satisfied with the length of time it took to have their call answered (80 per cent were satisfied compared with 72 per cent during standard hours). These differences should not be overstated – most, callers during both extended and standard hours, tended to be happy with the call waiting time. Also the number of respondents in the surveys who called during extended hours is small (81 in total) so the survey findings for this group are subject to high tolerances.
There is evidence that call waiting times vary by day of the week, with Mondays and Tuesdays viewed as being especially busy days prone to longer wait times. Analysis in Table G presents a breakdown of how quickly callers got through to the Helpline and satisfaction levels with call waiting time, split day of the week called.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table G: Variation in call waiting by day of week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whether got through on first attempt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through almost immediately after being held in a queue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through reasonably promptly after being held in queue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through eventually after being held in queue for a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - I was waiting too long so I hung up and called again later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction with waiting time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data for Saturday is indicative only due to small base size
* Less than 1%

The analysis based on respondents answers to the surveys (both wave 1 and 2) suggests there is in fact little variation in perceptions of call waiting by day of the week. The proportion of callers on Mondays who said they got through immediately is slightly lower than during Tuesday to Friday, but any differences are minimal and should not be overstated.
B. Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative research method consisted of two focus groups and eighteen telephone depth interviews with callers to the Helpline. These were broken into three key target groups of employees, employers and representatives. Within this further sub-group targets were set and have been outlined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYEES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two focus groups lasting up to 2 hours (4-6 participants) held in London</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ten telephone depths lasting 40 minutes (outside London)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 3x Employment Tribunal claimants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 3x Employment Tribunal avoiders (those thinking of making a claim but did not)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 4x any employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMPLOYERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four telephone depth interviews lasting 40 minutes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 2x large organisations – over 100 employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 2x small organisations – 100 employees or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPRESENTATIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four telephone depth interviews lasting 40 minutes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 2x Employer representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 2x Employee representatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both focus groups were held on the evening of the 23rd of June 2009. Recruitment was skewed towards those with less positive Helpline experiences. This was achieved through selection of individuals that scored lower levels of satisfaction in the wave 1 survey.

All respondents completed a short pre-task before attending the focus groups. This pre-task was used to help capture caller 'stories’ or background to the call, some of which may be too sensitive to discuss in a group setting. This also allowed for the focus groups to be centred on the Acas service rather than personal situations. Some of these stories were very detailed and had the potential to take up a lot of time if told within the group setting.

**Sampling for the focus groups and depth interviews**

The sample of callers to the Acas Helpline used for recruitment of participants in the qualitative research was the same sample used in wave one of the quantitative work. This was generated by advisers over a one-week period in January 2009. During this week the Helpline Data Capture System (DCS) was programmed to randomly select 60 per cent of callers (three in every five) to take part in the survey. Those who
were selected by the Helpline DCS were asked by the adviser if they would be willing to take part in a survey about the service they had received.

Potential participants were identified within this sample file according to key characteristics such as location for focus group participants and other factors described in the profile of participants.

The discussion guides

Three discussion guides were used in the research. These are listed below and can be found appended to this report in the section marked ‘Research Tools’.

- Employee and employee representative depth interviews
- Employer and employer representative depth interviews
- Employee focus groups
C. Employment Tribunals impact calculation

Employment Tribunal cases are of particular interest to Acas as they can be lengthy and expensive proceedings which in some cases might be avoided through timely advice. Through the data collected in the quantitative survey it is possible to estimate the impact of the helpline on the number of these cases.

In 2009 the survey findings suggest that information and advice provided to employee and former employee callers to the helpline may have helped to avoid 16,180 Employment Tribunal cases.

An estimated 222,080 current and former employees called the helpline in 2009. Based on the combined findings from wave one and two of the survey 31.0 per cent of these had been thinking about making an Employment Tribunal claim before they called the Acas Helpline, which equates to 68,850 people in 2009. From this group the surveys show that 23.5 per cent – that is, 16,180 people – decided not to make a claim and judged their call as having been very or fairly important in helping them make this decision.

Weighed against those callers who decided against making a claim, there were also a minority of cases where callers submitted an ET claim following their call to the Helpline despite not having previously intended to do so. Based on findings from both waves of the survey 57.5 per cent of current and former employees – i.e. 127,700 individual callers in 2009 – had not been thinking about making a claim before they called Acas. Of these, 3.5 per cent subsequently made a claim and rated their call as having been very or fairly important in helping them make this decision. This constitutes 4,470 callers throughout 2009 (i.e. just over one quarter of the number of cases avoided). In turn, this gives an estimated net figure of 11,710 Employment Tribunal cases avoided.

---

27 According to the Acas data capture system, there were 461,929 calls to the Helpline from current/former employees (including agency workers) in 2009. Taking these callers all together, the survey findings suggest an average of 2.08 calls per employee (averaged out between wave one and two). Therefore it can be estimated that 222,080 individual current/former employees had called the Helpline in 2009.

28 That is to say, following their call to the Helpline, this group had a) not made a claim and were not thinking about it and b) rated their call as ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important in helping them to decide whether or not to make a claim. It is important to note that this is a fairly crude estimate of the impact of the Helpline on Employment Tribunal cases and findings should be utilised with care. In particular, there are likely to have been a number of callers who had been thinking about making a claim before calling who would not, in the end, have made a claim – regardless of the information and advice they received from the Helpline adviser.

29 As mentioned above in footnote 2, this is a fairly crude estimate and in this case some of these callers are likely to have made a claim to the Employment Tribunal regardless of information or advice received from the adviser.
SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Please note that as with the body of the report, non responses have been excluded from the data presented in the Supplementary Tables.

### Table S1: Awareness of workplace discipline and grievance procedures (%)

#### Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,994</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table S2: Number of times used the Acas Helpline (mean score)

#### Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean calls</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,834</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean calls</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>2,007</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table S3: Main subject of call by caller type (%)

### Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, dismissal and grievance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays and working time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages (including National Minimum Wage)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, paternity and adoption</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence, sickness and stress</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and discrimination</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly policies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,837</strong></td>
<td><strong>425</strong></td>
<td><strong>887</strong></td>
<td><strong>136</strong></td>
<td><strong>176</strong></td>
<td><strong>211</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, dismissal and grievance</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays and working time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, paternity and adoption</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence, sickness and stress</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages (including National Minimum Wage)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly policies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and discrimination</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,983</strong></td>
<td><strong>510</strong></td>
<td><strong>882</strong></td>
<td><strong>163</strong></td>
<td><strong>235</strong></td>
<td><strong>191</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table S4: Agreement with statements about the information provided by Helpline advisers by caller type (%)

#### Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was valuable to you</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you to decide what to do next</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered your enquiry in full</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,740</strong></td>
<td><strong>424</strong></td>
<td><strong>817</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td><strong>172</strong></td>
<td><strong>198</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was valuable to you</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you to decide what to do next</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered your enquiry in full</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,882</strong></td>
<td><strong>491</strong></td>
<td><strong>829</strong></td>
<td><strong>153</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
<td><strong>181</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Bases vary for each of the three statements. Base sizes are presented for the first statement for indicative purposes.*
**Table S5: Discussion of making an ET claim by thinking about making a claim before the call (%)**

**Wave 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes - Discussed making an ET claim</th>
<th>No - Did not discuss making an ET claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - Had been thinking about making an ET claim</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - Had not been thinking about making an ET claim</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>332</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wave 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes - Discussed making an ET claim</th>
<th>No - Did not discuss making an ET claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - Had been thinking about making an ET claim</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - Had not been thinking about making an ET claim</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>367</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table S6: Overall satisfaction with the service by caller type (mean score)**

**Wave 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>1,885</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wave 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table S7: Whether would used the Acas Helpline again if had other enquiries related to employment issues (%)

Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,856</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table S8: Whether used the Acas website prior to the call (%)

Wave 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,692</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wave 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Former Employee</th>
<th>Employer Rep</th>
<th>Employee Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1,816</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bases exclude those without access to the internet and non responses
Table S9: Main topic of call by gender and age

Wave 2 only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main topic of call</th>
<th>Absence, sickness &amp; stress</th>
<th>Contracts</th>
<th>Discipline, dismissal &amp; grievance</th>
<th>Diversity &amp; Discrimination</th>
<th>Family friendly policies</th>
<th>Holidays &amp; working time</th>
<th>Maternity, paternity &amp; adoption</th>
<th>Redundancy, layoffs and business transfers</th>
<th>Wages (including NMW)</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female %</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-34 Total %</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female %</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 Total %</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male %</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female %</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ Total %</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages Total %</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESEARCH TOOLS

A. Wave 2 Questionnaire (postal)

INSTRUCTIONS

Acas Helpline User Survey: 2009

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. The questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and we will keep your answers completely confidential.

Please answer the questions as fully as you are able by crossing the boxes or writing in the spaces provided. Please return the completed questionnaire in the reply-paid envelope provided by Friday 11th of December.

Please read each question carefully. For most questions you will be asked to "☑" in the appropriate box next to the answer that describes you best. If you make a mistake, just blank out the mistake like this (■) and carry on. If you don’t know the answer just cross the “don’t know” box or leave the question blank. Please complete the questionnaire in a BLACK or BLUE pen only.

As a thank you for taking part, everyone who completes and returns a questionnaire will be entered into a prize draw with a chance of winning £500.

If you have any queries about the survey or completing the questionnaire, please contact Nicholas Fitzgerald at TNS on freephone number 0800 018 4814 (e-mail: acas@tns-online.com).
**NOTE:** If you have called the Helpline more than once recently, please answer in relation to the call you made when you were asked to take part in this survey.

**Q.1** When you tried to contact Acas, did you manage to speak to someone on your first call?
*PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Go To Q.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through almost immediately after being held in a queue for a only a few seconds</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through reasonably promptly after being held in a queue for a short while</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - I got through eventually after being held in a queue for a long time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - I was waiting too long so I hung up and called again later</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q.2** If you answered NO in Q.1, how many times in total did you call the helpline before getting through to someone? (That is including the call when you got through)
*PLEASE WRITE IN NUMBER OR ‘X’ DON’T KNOW*

Number of calls including the final call: [ ] [ ] Don’t Know ☐

**Q.3** How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the length of time it took for your call to be answered?
*PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairy dissatisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q.4** How did you become aware of the Acas Helpline?
*PLEASE ‘X’ ALL THAT APPLY*

- Recommendation from a work colleague/friend
- Your company/organisation
- Trade union/ Trade union representative
- Non-union staff representative
- Direct from Acas staff
- Acas website (www.acas.org.uk)
- Business Link website (www.businesslink.gov.uk)
- Directgov website (www.direct.gov.uk)
- Internet/search engine (e.g. Google)
- Advertisement (e.g. radio/newspaper/magazine)
- Newspaper/magazine/press article
- An Acas publication (booklet, newsletter, leaflet)
- Phone book/ Yellow Pages
- National Minimum Wage Helpline
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Jobcentre Plus
- HM Revenue & Customs (formerly the Inland Revenue)
- Other
- Don’t know
Q.5 From the list of subjects below, please indicate which were covered by your query

PLEASE 'X' ALL THAT APPLY IN THE FIRST COLUMN
PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX IN THE SECOND COLUMN SHOWING THE MAIN SUBJECT OF YOUR QUERY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) 'X' ALL THAT APPLY</th>
<th>(2) SELECT THE MAJOR SUBJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternity, paternity and adoption:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity rights</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternity rights</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave relating to adoption</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms and conditions</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice period/pay</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation period</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights of casual/temporary/fixed-term workers</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and discrimination:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion or belief discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age discrimination</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, dismissal and grievance:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline procedures</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievance procedures</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying/harassment</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence, sickness and stress:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick pay</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family friendly policies:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible working regulations</td>
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<td>Rights of part-time workers</td>
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<td>Time-off for dependants</td>
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<td>Holidays and working time:</td>
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<td>Holiday entitlement</td>
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<td>Working time regulations</td>
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<td>Bank/public holidays</td>
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<td>Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers:</td>
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<td>Lay-offs/short-time work</td>
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<td>Company take-over/merger</td>
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<td>Wages (including National Minimum Wage):</td>
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<td>National Minimum Wage</td>
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<td>Other wage issues</td>
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<td>Others:</td>
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<td>Trade union issues</td>
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<td>Information and consultation issues</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>References</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please 'X' box &amp; write in below)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Q.6 Please indicate how far you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY IN EACH ROW

Thinking about your call, the information provided...

Answered your enquiry in full
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Helped you to decide what to do next
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Was valuable to you
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q.7 As far as you are aware, are there formal discipline and grievance procedures in your workplace?
PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY

Yes  No  Don’t know

Q.8 Following your call to the Acas Helpline, what further options have you pursued?
PLEASE ‘X’ ALL THAT APPLY

Applied / implemented changes recommended by Acas
Discussing the problem with management/employee(s)/HR
Contacted Acas again
Sought advice/assistance from another body (e.g. trade union, solicitor, Citizens Advice Bureau)

→ IF SO: Please ‘X’ this box if Acas advised you to contact them
Took formal disciplinary action
Submitted a formal complaint (under organisation’s grievance procedure)
Took no further action
Other (please ‘X’ box & write in)

Q.9 Please indicate how far you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY IN EACH ROW

Thinking about your call, the Acas member of staff...

Was polite
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Was knowledgeable
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Behaved in a professional manner
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Presented the information in an impartial way
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Understood your query
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Gave you enough time to discuss your query
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Presented the information in a way you easily understood
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Explained the pros and cons of any options available to you
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Listened carefully to what you had to say
Agree  Neither agree nor disagree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q.10 Would you say that your conversation with the Helpline adviser was...?
PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY

Too long  About right  Too short

Q.11 Considering everything, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Acas Helpline?
PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY

Extremely satisfied  Very satisfied  Fairly satisfied  Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied  Fairly dissatisfied  Very dissatisfied  Extremely dissatisfied
Q.12 When you rang the Acas Helpline, were you calling...? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- As an employer  ➔ Q18
- As an employee  ➔ Q14
- As a former employee  ➔ Q14
- On behalf of an employer (in your capacity as a lawyer or other representative, e.g. pay clerk, HR manager etc.)  ➔ Q13
- On behalf of an employee (e.g. as a friend or relative of an employee, or as solicitor, trade union rep, or other representative of an employee)  ➔ Q21

Q.13 Are you directly employed by the organisation you made the call about? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes – directly employed by the organisation  ➔ Q21
- No – employed by another organisation/ self-employed  ➔ Q21

**EMPLOYERS please now go to Q18**

Only answer Q.14 to Q.17 if you are an EMPLOYEE or a FORMER EMPLOYEE

Q.14 Before you called the Acas Helpline, had you been thinking about making a claim to the Employment Tribunal? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes – I had been thinking about making a claim  ➔ Q15a
- No – I had not been thinking about making a claim  ➔ Q16
- Don’t know

Q.15 During your call to the Acas Helpline did you discuss the option of making a claim to the Employment Tribunal with the adviser? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes  ➔ Q15a
- No  ➔ Q16

Q.15a Did the Helpline adviser suggest that you speak to an Acas conciliator about the possibility of settling your potential claim? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes  ➔ Q15b
- No  ➔ Q16

Q.15b What was the outcome? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- I did not speak to an Acas conciliator
- I spoke to a conciliator and then decided not to take the matter any further
- I spoke to a conciliator but my employer was not willing to discuss settling the claim
- I negotiated with my employer through the conciliator but we were not able to settle the claim
- I negotiated with my employer through the conciliator and we settled the claim

Q.16 Following your call to the Acas Helpline have you made a claim to the Employment Tribunal? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes – I have made a claim
- No – I have not made a claim, but I am thinking about it
- No – I have not made a claim and I am not thinking about it

Q.17 How important was your call to the Acas Helpline in helping you decide whether or not to make a claim? *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY

- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Don’t know
- Not applicable

**EMPLOYEES AND FORMER EMPLOYEES please now go to Q21**

Only answer Q.18 to Q.20 if you are an EMPLOYER

Q.18 Please indicate which of the following you have done as a result of your call to the Acas Helpline. *PLEASE X* ONE BOX ONLY IN EACH ROW

As a result of your call to the Acas Helpline have you....

- Updated or improved any existing policies at your workplace?  ➔ Q18
- Implemented any new policies at your workplace?  ➔ Q18

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Q.19a When you rang the Acas Helpline, was it in response to concerns that one or more of your employees was considering making a claim to the Employment Tribunal?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Yes ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.19b
No ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.21

Q.19b Did the Helpline adviser suggest that you speak to an Acas conciliator about the possibility of settling your employee's potential claim?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Yes ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.19c
No ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.20

Q.19c What was the outcome?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
I did not speak to an Acas conciliator ☐
I spoke to a conciliator and then decided not to take the matter any further ☐
I spoke to a conciliator but my employee was not willing to discuss settling the claim ☐
I negotiated with my employee through the conciliator but we were not able to settle the claim ☐
I negotiated with my employee through the conciliator and we settled the claim ☐

Q.20 If you answered Yes at Q19a, how useful would you say the call was in helping you to deal with the situation you were concerned about?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Very useful ☐
Fairly useful ☐
Not very useful ☐
Not at all useful ☐

ALL to answer:

Q.21 Would you use the Acas Helpline again if you had other enquiries relating to employment issues?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Yes ☐  ➔
No ☐  ➔
Don't know ☐

Q.22 How likely are you to recommend the Acas Helpline to a friend or work colleague?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Very likely ☐
Fairly likely ☐
Neither likely nor unlikely ☐
Fairly unlikely ☐
Very unlikely ☐

Q.23 Approximately how many times in the last 12 months have you used the Acas Helpline? (Including the call where you were asked to take part in this survey)
Number of times used in last 12 months    ☐
Don't know ☐

Q.24 Do you have access to the internet?  PLEASE 'X' ALL THAT APPLY
Yes, at work ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.25
Yes, outside of work ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.25
No access ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.26

Q.25 If you have access to the internet, did you try to find the answer to your enquiry on the Acas website before you called the Helpline?  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY
Yes ☐
No ☐

Q.26 Please indicate how likely you are to use the following sources for information on employment issues in the future.  PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY FOR EACH SOURCE

The Acas website

Acas publications

Very likely ☐
Fairly likely ☐
Neither likely nor unlikely ☐
Fairly unlikely ☐
Very unlikely ☐
Don't know ☐
We would like to know something about you, in order to ensure that Acas’ services meet the needs of all sections of the population. Please answer those questions you feel comfortable with. The information will be used when analysing data, but it will NOT be possible to identify any individuals. Acas will not share or otherwise disclose your personal information to any third parties.

Q.27 Are you… PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   Male ☐ Female ☐

Q.28 What is your age?
   Age (in years): __________

Q.29 How would you describe your ethnic group? PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   White ☐ British ☐ Black or Black British ☐ Caribbean ☐
   Irish ☐ African ☐
   Mixed ☐ White and Black Caribbean ☐ Chinese or other group ☐ Chinese ☐
   White and Black African ☐ Any other ethnic group ☐
   White and Asian ☐ (please ‘X’ box & write in below)
   Asian/Asian British ☐
   Indian ☐ Pakistani ☐ Bangladeshi ☐

Q.30 Would you say you speak English as your first or main language? PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   Yes ☐ No ☐

Q.31 Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability? By long-term, we mean that it can be expected to last for more than one year. PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   Yes ☐ ☐ Go TO Q.32
   No ☐ ☐ Go TO Q.33

Q.32 If you answered YES at Q31, does this long-term illness, health problem or disability affect the amount or type of work you can do? PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   Yes ☐ No ☐

Q.33 What is your religion? PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   None ☐ Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations) ☐
   Muslim ☐ Sikh ☐
   Buddhist ☐ Hindu ☐ Any other religion, (please ‘X’ box & write in below)

Q.34 Are you… PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   Straight or heterosexual ☐ Any other, (please ‘X’ box & write in below) ☐
   Gay or lesbian or homosexual ☐
   Bisexual ☐

The next few questions are about your workplace and the larger organisation that your workplace is part of. By workplace we mean the site or location at, or from, which you work.

Q.35 Approximately how many employees are there at your workplace? PLEASE ‘X’ ONE BOX ONLY
   1 to 4 ☐ 5 to 9 ☐ 10 to 49 ☐
   50 to 99 ☐ 100 to 249 ☐ 250 to 499 ☐
   500+ ☐ Don’t know ☐

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Q.36 Is your workplace part of a larger organisation? PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Yes ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.37
No ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.38
Don't know ☐  ➔ GO TO Q.38

Q.37 Approximately how many employees work for the organisation as a whole? PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Less than 50 ☐  500 to 999 ☐  1000 to 4999 ☐
50 to 249 ☐  250 to 499 ☐  5000 + ☐
Don't know ☐

Q.38 What does the organisation/business mainly make or do at the place where you worked when you called the Acas Helpline? (For example, 'care home', 'bank', 'construction company', 'supermarket') PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW


Q.39 What was the name/title of your job at the time that you called the Acas Helpline? (For example, 'care worker', 'administrator', 'resource manager', 'carpenter') PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW


Q.40 Are you currently... PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

A full-time employee ☐  Self-employed ☐  Unemployed ☐
A part-time employee ☐  An agency worker/temp ☐

Q.41 How long has your organisation/business been in operation? PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Less than 12 months ☐  2 years up to 5 years ☐  Don't know ☐
1 year, less than 2 years ☐  More than 5 years ☐

Q.42 Do you work in the... PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Private sector ☐  Not-for-profit/voluntary sector ☐
Public sector ☐  Don't know ☐

Q.43 Does your workplace have a personnel or human resources specialist or department? PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Yes ☐  No ☐  Don't know ☐

Q.44 Are you a member of a trade union? PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Yes ☐  No ☐  Don't know ☐

Q.45 It is possible that Acas may undertake some further research to follow up on particular issues arising from this survey. Would you be willing to be re-contacted by Acas for this purpose? Acas will use your personal data for RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY. PLEASE 'X' ONE BOX ONLY

Yes ☐  No ☐

Thank you for completing this survey. Please now return your form in the enclosed reply paid envelope.

If you have any additional comments or suggested improvements you would like to see made to the Helpline, you can email these to TNS at Acas@tns-online.com
B. Cover Letter – Wave 2 (postal)

ACAS HELPLINE USER SURVEY 2009

Tuesday 3rd November

Dear [SurveyTitle] [SurveySurname]

Acas has commissioned TNS-BMRB Social Research to carry out a customer satisfaction survey of Helpline users so that we can further improve our service to callers. This questionnaire has been sent to you because you kindly agreed to take part in the survey during a call you made to the Acas Helpline in October and gave your permission to be contacted.

TNS-BMRB is an independent research organisation with a strong track record of conducting high quality attitude surveys. You can therefore rest assured that your responses will be treated in strictest confidence. Please return the completed questionnaire in the reply-paid envelope provided by Friday 11th December.

As a thank you for taking part, everyone who completes and returns a questionnaire will be entered into a prize draw with a chance of winning £500. The winner of the prize will be informed in January when the survey closes.

If you have any queries about the survey or completing the questionnaire, please contact Nicholas Fitzgerald at TNS-BMRB on freephone number 0800 018 4814 (e-mail: acas@tns-online.com).

On behalf of Acas, I would like to thank you in advance for your help with this important research.

Yours sincerely,

John Taylor
Acas Chief Executive
C. Discussion Guides - Qualitative

Acas Helpline Research

Discussion Guide - Employee & Employee rep depth interviews

40 mins
2nd June 2009

Warm up & Introductions (5 mins)

- Purpose of the research
- Anonymity, recording and incentive
- Moderator to explain that we are not here to discuss personal or private details, only their experiences and view of the helpline. However if they want to discuss details of their call they can do so, and responses are anonymous.
- Any questions?
- Respondent warm up: name, brief description of their role

Awareness, knowledge and Expectations (5 mins)

- Awareness and knowledge of Acas
  - Awareness of the Helpline
  - Awareness of other Acas services

- Expectations of the Acas Helpline
- Motivations and barriers to calling helpline
  - Who calls the helpline
  - Why call the helpline?
  - What are the main barriers to calling the helpline?
  - What type of caller would benefit most from a call to the helpline?
  - Who do you think the Acas Helpline is targeted at?
  - Why would other employees not call the helpline? / What might encourage more people to use it?

Understanding the Acas Experience (15 mins)

- What was broadly good about the Acas experience?
- What was not so good?
- Stages in the case journey – mapping (Brief details at each stage to develop a story)

Before
- Background to the call (for reps – probe relation to the caller / why did they call and not the person who the call was actually about)
- Who or what else is involved
At what stage in the process do you call helpline and why.
Multiple calls?
Feeling before calling helpline

During

- **Tell me about the helpline adviser (s)**
- **What would the ideal adviser be like**
- **Probe specifically on whether adviser:**
  - explained the pros and cons of the options available
  - used language that was accurate and appropriate? *(Employee Reps – professionals only)*
  - had a good understanding of relevant language and terminology? *(Employee Reps – professionals only)*
  - was impartial - What does this mean to you?
- Do you see the Acas Helpline as providing ‘Impartial’ advice?

After

- Impact
- What happened next?
- How was the information / advice obtained made use of?
- Has anything changed / did anything change in the workplace as a result? What?

- Were you aware of the option of making an ET claim – how were you informed of this?
- Probe on awareness of other Acas services and pros and cons of using these

ET Claimants / avoiders

- Tell me about the decision making process with regards to making an ET claim or not
- How did you decide to make a claim or not to make a claim
- What influence did the helpline have on your decision to make a claim or not
- (ET Claimants) Is there anything that the Helpline have done differently that would have caused you to change your mind about making an ET claim?
Optimising the Acas Experience (10 mins)

- Summarise what improvements could be made to the helpline
  - Helpline hours. Ok? When would you prefer to call? Would extended hours be useful?
- Trade off - What’s most important? Categorise top three improvements
- Discussion of additional options that could be used in future
  - Web-based instant messaging service (i.e. talk online in ‘real time’, one-to-one with an Acas adviser, via your PC)
  - Internet chatrooms/ discussion forums (post comments and receive answers, or chat live with Acas and other employees and employers about issues that are affecting you)
  - Email
  - SMS text messaging
  - Other ideas?

Summary (5 mins)

- Sum up your feelings towards Acas and your experiences of it
- What would you say to a friend if you were recommending it?
- What is the one thing you would say to the Chief Executive in order to improve the service?
- Would you use it again? Why / why not?

Thanks and Close
Acas Helpline Research
Discussion Guide - Employer & Employer rep telephone depth interviews
40 mins
2nd June 2009

Warm up & Introductions (5 mins)

- Purpose of the research
- Anonymity, recording and incentive
- Moderator to explain that we are not here to discuss personal or private details, only their experiences and view of the helpline. However if they want to discuss details of their call they can do so, and responses are anonymous.
- Any questions?
- Respondent warm up: name, brief description of their role

Awareness, knowledge and Expectations (5 mins)

- Awareness and knowledge of Acas
  - Awareness of the Helpline
  - Awareness of other Acas services
- Expectations of the Acas Helpline

Understanding the Acas Experience (15 mins)

- Broadly, what was good about the Acas experience?
- What was not so good?
- Stages in the case journey – mapping (Brief details at each stage to develop a story)

**Before**
- Background to the call (for reps – probe relation to the caller / why did they call and not the person who the call was actually about)
- Who or what else was / is involved
- At what stage in the process did / do you call helpline and why. Multiple calls?
- Feeling before calling helpline
During

- Tell me about the helpline adviser (s)
- What would the ideal adviser be like
- Probe specifically on whether adviser:
  - explained the pros and cons of the options available
  - used language that was accurate and appropriate? (Employer Reps – HR execs particularly)
  - had a good understanding of relevant language and terminology? (Employer Reps – HR execs particularly)

After

- What happened next?
- How was the information / advice obtained made use of?
- Were there any policy updates or brand new policies as a result of the Helpline call/s? Which policies/changes in the workplace? To what extent were these due to Helpline call?

- Would you call Helpline if you thought one or more of your employees was considering putting in an ET claim against you?
  - What sort of service would you expect in this situation?
    - From the Helpline
    - Other Acas services
  - Would a conciliation service be helpful in situations such as this?
    - Advantages/disadvantages of using such a service
      [might have to describe PCC – see note on focus group discussion guide]

- Motivations and barriers to calling helpline
  - Who calls the helpline / who is it targeted at – probe for proportion of employers versus employees
  - Why call the helpline? Why did you call the helpline
  - What are the main barriers to calling the helpline? Why would other employers not call the helpline (probe for whether they think helpline is more for employees)
  - What type of caller would benefit most from a call to the helpline?
- What is most important for the helpline to be
  - To what extent is the helpline impartial
  - What does ‘impartial’ mean
  - How important is impartiality to you
  - Do you see the Acas Helpline as providing ‘Impartial’ advice?
Optimising the Acas Experience (10 mins)

- Summarise what improvements could be made to the helpline
  - Probe on Helpline hours. Ok? When would you prefer to call? Would extended hours be useful?
- Trade off - What’s most important? Categorise top three improvements
- Discussion of additional options that could be used in future
  - Web-based text service
  - On screen discussion forums
  - Answer type forums
  - Email
  - SMS text messaging
  - Other ideas?

Summary (5 mins)

- Sum up your feelings towards Acas and your experiences of it
- What would you say to a friend if you were recommending it?
- What is the one thing you would say to the Chief Executive in order to improve the service?
- Would you use it again? Why / why not?

Thanks and Close
Acas Helpline Research
Discussion Guide - Employees – focus groups

2 hours
2nd June 2009

Warm up & Introductions

- Purpose of the research & general housekeeping
- Anonymity, recording and incentive
- Moderator to explain that we are not here to discuss personal or private details, only their experiences and view of the helpline
- Check on pre-tasks – their story diary
- Any questions?
- Respondent introductions: name, age, family situation, hobbies

Awareness and expectations of Acas

- When I say Acas – what words and pictures come to mind? (associations)
- What do you know of Acas’ remit – what function do they provide?
- Where did you first hear about Acas?
  - Probe knowledge and awareness of the helpline
- Probe knowledge and awareness of other Acas services
  - e.g. training, business and skills solutions, services for small businesses, independent / collective arbitration, conciliation and mediation, international services and equality and diversity advisory service
- In what ways were you expecting Acas to help you when you first got in touch? (moderator to capture and probe on flip chart)
- Before you called, what expectations did you have of the nature of the service itself? (probe on professionalism, impartiality etc)

Thinking beyond your personal experiences why might someone call the help line...

- What are the main reasons someone might call the Acas helpline (moderator to capture on a flip chart)
  - Why might somebody call the helpline?
  - What are the main barriers to calling the helpline?
  - What are the main things that make the Acas helpline unique?
  - Where else would you go to fulfil needs that Acas couldn’t help you with?
  - Could Acas incorporate these ideas into their service?
Understanding the Acas Experience

Thinking about your experiences of the Acas helpline...

- Broadly speaking, what was good about the experience?
- What was not so good about the experience?

Before the call

- What triggered you to call when you did – what stage was your query or issue at?
- What were your needs at this stage?
- What were your feelings at this stage?
- What could Acas have done to be more helpful at this stage?

During the call

- How did you feel you were treated by Acas?
- Was the manner of the assistant appropriate? Why / why not?
- Did you feel the Acas adviser explained the pros and cons of the options available to you? Why/why not?
- What could Acas have done to be more helpful at this stage?

After the call

- How did you feel after having used the service? (probe for emotional needs)
- Was the advice they gave you useful?
- Did you have all your questions answered?
- What were your needs at this stage?
- What were your feelings at this stage?
- What could Acas have done to be more helpful at this stage?
- How did you go on to use the information/advice provided (if at all)?

Call backs

- Did you call back to use the service again for the same case?
- How was the second or third call that you made, how did this compare to the first time you called?
- What types of situations prompted you to do this?
- Why did you feel that Acas would be helpful at this stage?
- What could Acas have done to be more helpful at this stage?
- Who or what else was involved in terms of advice provision throughout your dealings with Acas?
  - Did they provide something additional / necessary to the service?
  - What could Acas learn from this alternative source to improve their service?
Optimising the Acas Experience (30 mins)

Moderator to explain that we are going to be spending the rest of the session discussing how we can improve the service to make it as effective as possible

**Helpline Adviser Projective Exercise**

- What skills would they have
- What would their personality be like
- How would you like to feel talking to them? How can they achieve this?
- Respondents to prioritise top wants

- Probe benefit of 'impartiality' if not already raised
  - What does this mean to you?
  - Is this an important characteristic for an Acas Helpline Adviser to have?
  - Do you see the Acas Helpline as providing 'Impartial' advice? Why / why not?
- Did anyone contemplate making an ET claim – what does this involve

Moderator to read out if respondents are unsure of what an ET is

An ET claim is a claim you make to the tribunal service. This is like a court but it is not as formal; for example, nobody wears a wig or gown. However, like a court it must act independently and cannot give legal advice. Almost all hearings are open to the public.

- (ALL)What would be important to you if you were thinking about or had decided to submit an ET claim
  - Would you be more or less likely to call in this situation? Why / why not?
  - What would you expect in this situation?
    - From the Helpline
    - Other Acas services – probe for level of Acas involvement e.g. Acas contacting the other party on your behalf to seek a resolution
o (ET claimants and avoiders) What impact did the helpline have on your decision to either make an ET Claim or not to make an ET claim
o (ET claimants) What would have persuaded you not to make an ET claim

- Summarise and discuss the ways in which Acas could improve the helpline (*moderator to capture on cards*)
  - Helpline hours – are these ok? When would you prefer to call? Would extended hours be useful?

*Group to rank in order or importance*
*Group to trade off the most / least important and provide reasoning for each*
*Group to agree on the top three improvements*

**Alternative ideas for the future**

*Let’s discuss some suggestions that have been made for alternative communication channels*
*Show stimulus materials as appropriate (examples below):*
  - Web-based text service
  - On screen discussion forums
  - Answer type forums
  - Email
  - SMS text messaging
  - Other ideas?

**Summary (5 mins)**

- Sum up your feelings towards Acas and your experiences of it
- What would you say to a friend if you were recommending it?
- What is the one thing you would say to the Chief Executive in order to improve the service?
- Would you use it again? Why / why not?

*Thank and Close.*