

research paper

04/03

Acas User Feedback Report 2003:

Helpline

Prepared for Acas by
BMRB Social Research

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acas Research and Evaluation Section and BMRB are grateful to all those involved in the design and management of this study. Particular thanks go to regional Acas staff who assisted with the work and also callers to the Acas Helpline who participated in the study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) regularly monitors customers' attitudes to its services through its annual Acas-wide Customer Survey. In 2003, BMRB Social Research was commissioned to collect feedback from customers using Acas services. Feedback was collected from customers using either the telephone Helpline or individual conciliation (involving claims to employment tribunal). This report presents the findings of the survey of callers to the Acas Helpline.

- 959 questionnaires were returned from a total of 1600 that were mailed out giving a response rate of 60 per cent
- Considering everything, 92 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from the Acas Helpline, with 62 per cent of callers saying they were very satisfied
- Just over four fifths of respondents (81 per cent) whose call was answered within a few seconds were very satisfied with the service provided by the Helpline, this compares to 69 per cent of respondents whose call was answered in less than one minute and half of respondents whose call took over one minute to be answered
- Nearly all respondents (97 per cent) said that if they had any other queries relating to employment related issues, they would call the Acas Helpline
- 43 per cent of respondents were calling as an employer, 35 per cent were calling as a current employee/worker, 6 per cent were calling as a former employee/worker and 16 per cent were calling on behalf of someone else
- 60 per cent of respondents who called the helpline on behalf of themselves were working or worked in a small business (fewer than 50 employees/workers)
- Just over half of those who took part in the survey (52 per cent) had had previous contact with Acas
- Just under half of all respondents (45 per cent) had called the Acas Helpline before
- Callers were asked to identify the most convenient time for them to call. Three in ten callers (30 per cent) did not have a preference and four in ten (41 per cent) selected a time outside the current opening times of the Helpline (9.00am to 4.30pm).
- Just over a quarter of respondents who had access to the internet had checked the Acas website before calling the Helpline (26 per cent)
- The majority of respondents (94 per cent) said they managed to speak to someone on their first call. Over half (52 per cent) managed to speak to someone in less than one minute
- Three quarters of respondents (75 per cent) said they were satisfied with the length of time for their call to be answered
- Over four fifths of respondents (84 per cent) agreed that the information answered their enquiry in full and over a third agreed strongly (36 per cent). This was slightly less than the 2000 survey (88 per cent agreed in 2000)

- Just under four in five callers (79 per cent) agreed that the information provided helped them to decide what to do next, and just under a third agreed strongly (31 per cent). This was 11 per cent down from the 2000 survey (90 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement).
- There was near universal approval about the attitudes of the Helpline staff who answered the calls, 85 per cent plus on every measure we asked about
- Just under four fifths of callers (79 per cent) said that they would find free printed information from Acas helpful, compared to 31 per cent for charged printed information.
- The Acas Helpline service has received very positive feedback from its customers in nearly all areas, and this high standard of service should be applauded and maintained.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Acas telephone Helpline is a national service that handles around 800,000 calls a year. The service is now run from 12 offices spread across England and Wales (although only 11 offices were operational during the research) and provides information on a wide range of issues related to employment law and employment practice. The service is used by not only employees and employers, but also by their representatives such as solicitors, trade union representatives and family members.

The Acas telephone Helpline, on 08457 47 4747, currently takes calls Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 4.30pm and Acas is considering extending these hours. There are approximately 100 Helpline staff and the average call length is just over four minutes.

The Acas commitment lays out a number of guiding values that Acas seeks to meet. The survey seeks to obtain customer feedback on those elements of the Acas commitment relating to the Helpline.

1.1 Objectives

BMRB Social Research, an independent research company, was commissioned in March 2003 to carry out a customer feedback survey of callers to the Acas Helpline.

BMRB Social Research had conducted the previous year's survey (2002) where measures were developed (some based on a previous survey of the Helpline in 2000) to monitor customer attitudes over time. The customer feedback survey in 2000 was conducted by ORC International using a longer questionnaire, however several areas of questioning are similar to the more recent survey. This year's survey set out to assess current levels of satisfaction and to compare findings with previous research.

There are marked differences between the methods recently employed to carry out the research among callers to the Helpline; these differences limit the scope for direct comparison of results with both of the previous surveys. The key differences are:

- In 2002 three offices provided a sample of callers to be surveyed. However for the 2000 and 2003 surveys all 11 offices provided sample.
- The 2000 survey used a questionnaire that was 50per cent longer than the subsequent two surveys.

Where appropriate (i.e. where the same questions were asked) this report compares this year's findings with the 2000 survey, as both surveys employed similar sampling methods and areas of questioning.

1.2 Methodology

The survey was carried out using a self-completion questionnaire. The questionnaire was similar to the one used last year that had been developed and formatted by BMRB Social Research, in consultation with Acas.

Helpline staff collected sample information from all 11 regional offices over a two-day period in the week commencing 24th March. All callers to the Helpline were asked if they were willing to take part in a customer feedback survey for Acas. If they agreed, their details were recorded and passed on to

BMRB. Sample was selected proportionate to the amount supplied by each office, so that as far as possible the sample profile reflected the actual proportion of calls taken by each office. Customer records were then checked against each other to ensure that customers were not sent more than one questionnaire from Acas, in a process called de-duplication. Following de-duplication and quality checking of the sample, questionnaires were sent to 1600 callers. The initial mailout was despatched on the 2nd of May and there were two reminder mailouts before fieldwork was closed on the 13th of June. A total of 959 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 60 per cent.

1.3 Understanding the analysis

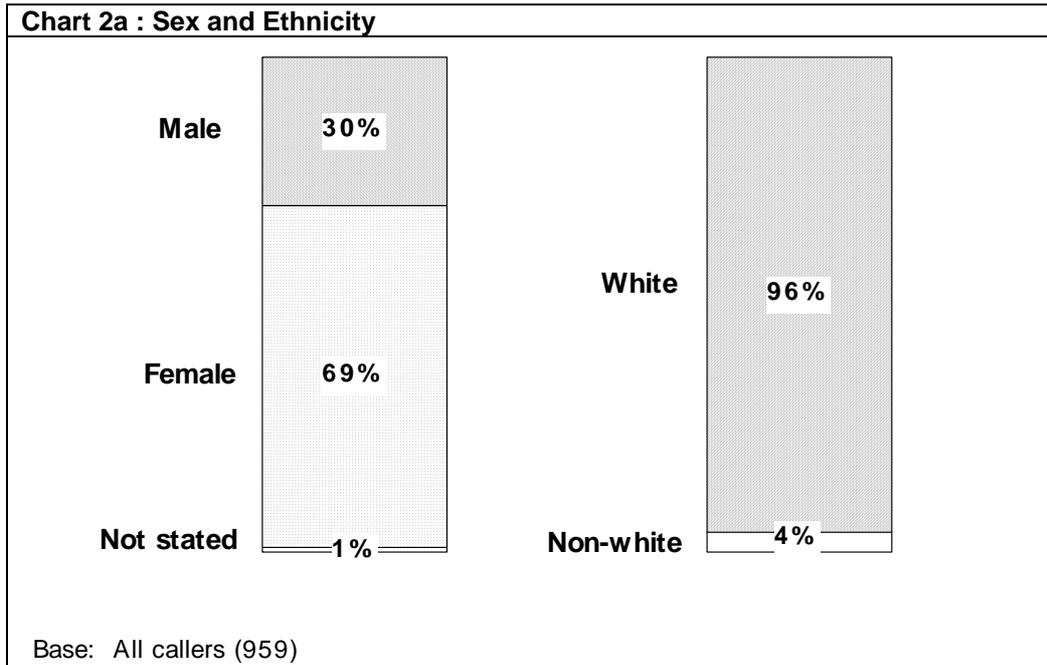
The tables in the report show column percentages unless otherwise stated. Figures have been rounded to the nearest percent, so the total may sometimes not add up to 100 per cent. Where respondents were able to give more than one answer, the total will add up to more than 100 per cent. Significant differences between the results of the 2000 and 2003 surveys have been marked on the relevant charts. Throughout the report comparisons are made between employers and employees/workers. Where these are made it should be noted that employees/workers also includes the category of former as well as current employees/workers.

2. PROFILE OF CALLERS

This chapter provides a profile of survey respondents according to their sex and ethnicity, the role in which they were calling the Helpline, and where relevant some details about the organisation they work or worked for.

2.1 Sex and Ethnicity

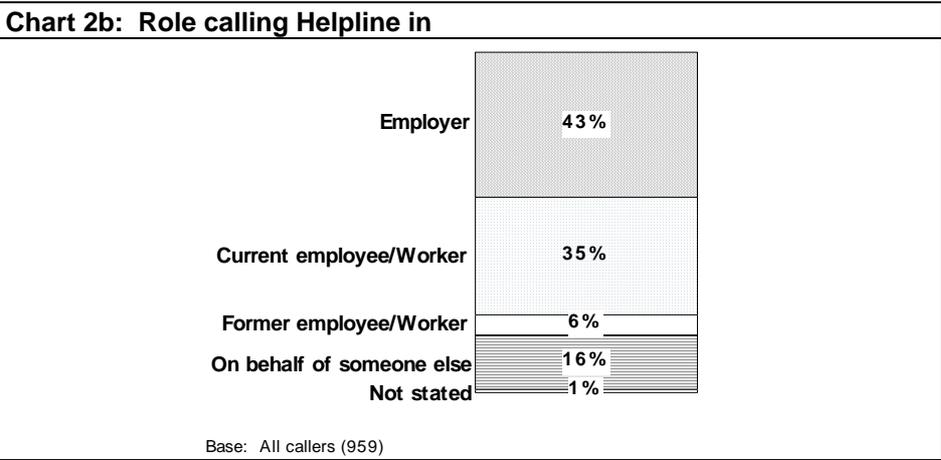
In 2003 respondents were asked to state their sex and ethnicity and the results are shown in Chart 2a below.



Nearly seven in ten respondents (69 per cent) were female and 96 per cent of respondents classified themselves as 'white'.

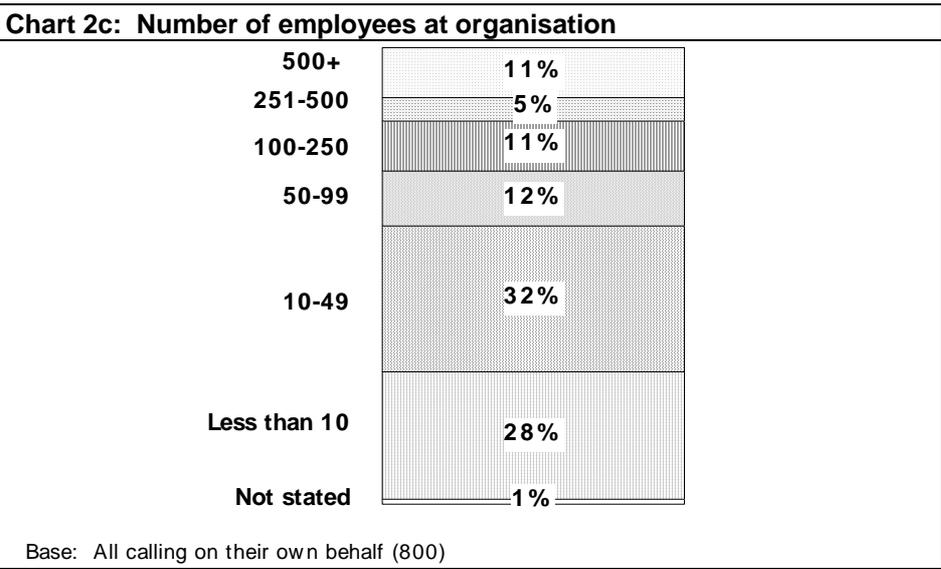
2.2 Role calling the Helpline in

Respondents were asked what role they were calling the Helpline in and the results are shown in Chart 2b. One in six callers to the Helpline (16 per cent) were calling on behalf of someone else. Just over a third (35 per cent) were calling as a current employee/worker and 6 per cent were former employees/workers. The largest group using the Helpline service was employers (43 per cent). These proportions are similar to those in the previous two surveys of Helpline callers.



2.3 The organisation

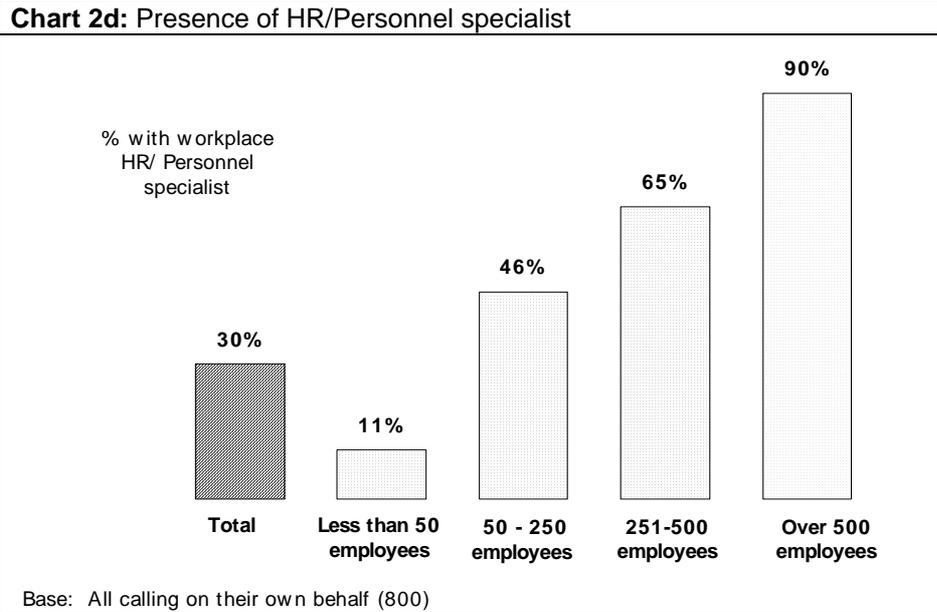
All callers who were calling on behalf of themselves were asked about the organisation they currently or previously worked for. Firstly respondents were asked approximately how many people were employed in their organisation and the results are shown in chart 2c.



Three fifths of respondents calling the Helpline on their own behalf (60 per cent) worked for a small business (an organisation with fewer than 50 employees).

Respondents were then asked what sector they worked in, nearly seven in ten (68per cent) worked in the private sector, a fifth (19per cent) worked in the public sector and 7 per cent declared that they worked in the voluntary sector.

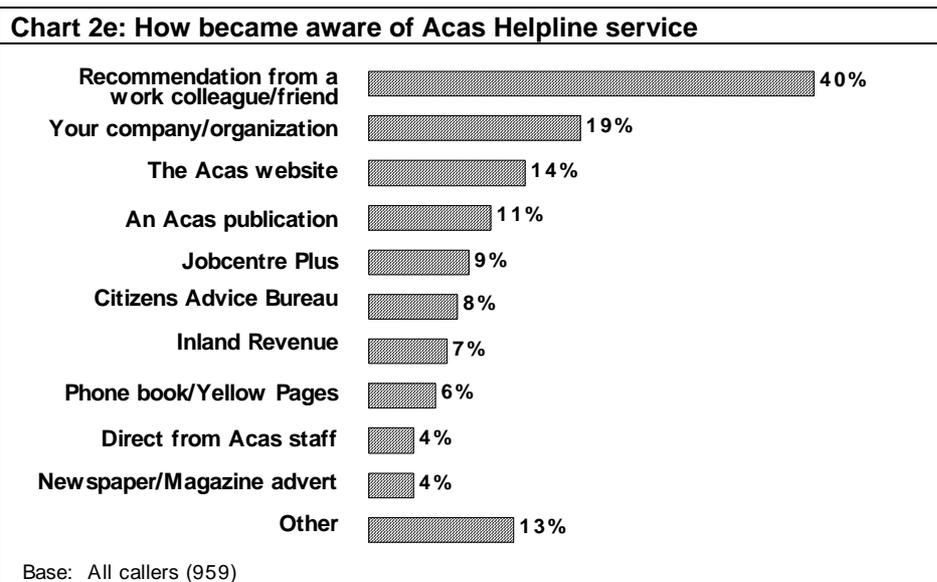
The final question asked whether or not a personnel/human resources specialist was present at the organisation the respondent worked for. Results are shown in chart 2d.



Most respondents (65 per cent) did not have a personnel or human resources specialist at their workplace (about three in ten callers to the Helpline (30 per cent) did have one. This result is similar to the 2002 and 2000 surveys (29 per cent and 25 per cent respectively had a personnel or human resources specialist). As might be expected respondents calling from a smaller workplace were least likely to have a personnel/human resources specialist (11 per cent of workplaces with fewer than 50 employees compared to 90 per cent of those with more than 500).

2.4 Previous knowledge and experience of Acas

Respondents were asked how they became aware of the Acas Helpline and the results are shown in chart 2e.



Two fifths of callers to the Helpline (40 per cent) first became aware of the Helpline service after a recommendation from a work colleague or a friend.

Half of all employees (48 per cent) had the Helpline suggested to them by a friend or work colleague compared to 36 per cent of employers and 33 per cent of representatives. It seems that employees rely more on word of mouth to find out about the Helpline than the employers. Nearly three in ten employers (29 per cent) had the Helpline suggested by their company/organisation; unsurprisingly this was significantly higher than for employees (9 per cent).

Respondents were also asked about any previous experience they have had with Acas. Results are shown in table 2a, disaggregated by the role they were calling the Helpline in.

Base All callers (959)	Total (959)	Employer (409)	Employee (391)	Someone else's behalf (152)
No previous contact	47	29	64	54
Acas Helpline	45	62	29	39
Acas publication	17	28	5	16
Acas website	15	23	5	15
Tribunal application	8	12	4	5
Attended an Acas event	7	12	1	7
Advisory work	3	4	2	2
Collective dispute	2	2	2	1
Other	2	3	1	5
Not stated	1	*	1	-

Just over half of those who took part in the survey (52 per cent) had had previous contact with Acas, this is the same proportion as the 2000 survey. Seven in ten employers (71 per cent) had contact with Acas before this call, compared to just over a third of employees (35 per cent) and just under half (46 per cent) of those calling on someone else's behalf.

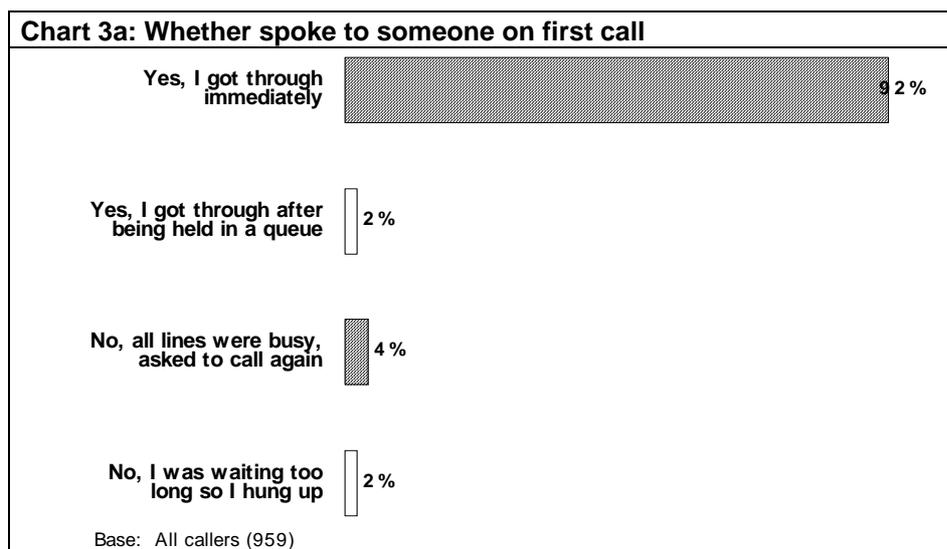
Nearly half of all respondents (45 per cent) said they had previously called the Acas Helpline. This is by far the most common form of previous contact people had with Acas. This was especially true for employers, nearly two thirds of whom (62 per cent) had called the Helpline before. The next most common forms of previous contact with Acas overall were through an Acas publication (17 per cent) and the Acas website (15 per cent). These sources could be where respondents obtained the Acas helpline number.

3. MAKING THE CALL

This chapter looks at the call that respondents made to the Acas Helpline when they were invited to participate in the research. Those who had previously had contact with Acas were asked to think only about the call when answering the questions.

3.1 Getting through

All callers were asked whether they managed to speak to someone on their first call, the results are shown in chart 3a.



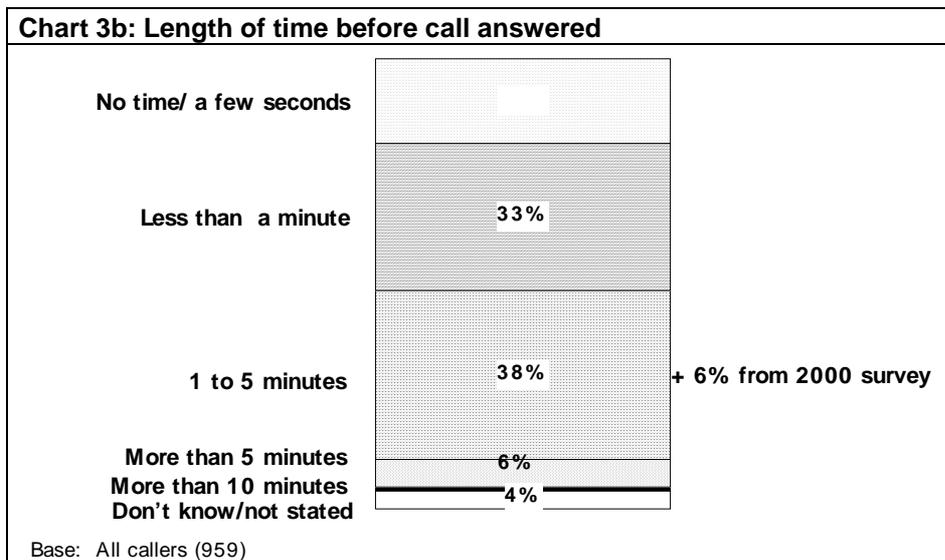
The majority of respondents (94 per cent) said that they were able to speak to somebody on their first call, which was an increase of ten per cent compared to the 2000 survey (84 per cent). This comprised of 92 per cent of callers who said they managed to get through to somebody straight away (up from 38 per cent of callers in the 2000 survey) and just two per cent of callers who said they got through to somebody but only after hearing the message service first (down from 46 per cent at the 2000 survey). Six per cent of respondents said they failed to speak to somebody on their first call attempt which is down from 14 per cent at the 2000 survey. All respondents who had their calls taken by staff at the Liverpool and Manchester offices reported that they got through on their first call.

Respondents who failed to speak to somebody on their first call attempt were asked how many unsuccessful calls they had made. The results showing how many calls were made before contact was made with a Helpline member of staff are shown in table 3a. The vast majority of callers (93 per cent) got through on their first call. These results are broadly similar to the findings in 2000.

Table 3a: Number of attempts at getting through

Base: All callers (959)	Total %
Once	93
2-4 times	5
More than five times	1

Callers to the Acas Helpline were then asked how long they had to wait before a member of staff answered their call. The results reflect their perceptions and not necessarily the real time. The results are shown in chart 3b.

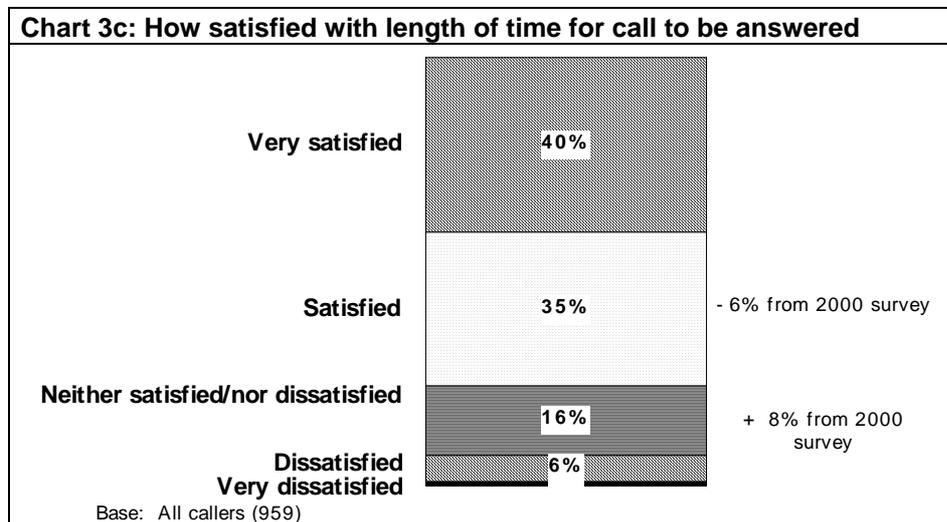


Over half of respondents (52 per cent) said they waited for less than a minute before their call was answered, including 19 per cent who waited no time/a few seconds. Seven per cent of callers said they had to wait for longer than five minutes for their call to be answered (1 per cent said they had to wait for over ten minutes). In the 2000 survey, 21 per cent waited no time/a few seconds, 35 per cent waited less than a minute, 32 per cent waited between 1 and 5 minutes and about 8 per cent waited 5 minutes or more. Hence, the results were similar to those in the 2000 survey, although a slightly lower proportion of respondents said they waited less than a minute resulting in a rise by six per cent in the proportion saying they waited between 1 and 5 minutes.

There were some differences in the time callers reported waiting according to which office took their call. Respondents whose calls were taken by the Cardiff office had the shortest wait with nearly three quarters of calls (73 per cent) answered in under a minute, followed by calls taken at the Glasgow office where just over three fifths of calls (63 per cent) were answered within one minute. Interestingly, although all respondents got through to Liverpool or Manchester office on their first call, it was these respondents who reported the longest wait with over half of calls taking over a minute to be answered (55 per cent at Liverpool and 52 per cent at Manchester). As mentioned above, these may not be the real lengths of time and are instead the respondents' impressions of how long they had to wait.

3.2 Satisfaction with length of time for call to be answered

Respondents were then asked how satisfied they were with the length of time they had to wait for their call to be answered. The results are show in chart 3c.



Three quarters of respondents (75 per cent) said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the length of time it took for their call to be answered (40 per cent said they were very satisfied). This is similar to the result at the 2000 survey when four fifths of respondents (80 per cent) said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the length of time taken to answer the call. This decrease in the level of satisfaction appears to have been caused by a higher proportion of respondents stating they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (16 per cent in 2003 compared to 8 per cent in 2000 said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied). The level of satisfaction at the 2003 survey is 11 per cent higher than the 2002 survey (64 per cent were satisfied in 2002).

Given that calls to the Cardiff office were the most likely to be answered in under one minute it is not surprising to find that Cardiff scored the highest on levels of satisfaction with the length of time for the call to be answered. Nearly nine in ten respondents (86 per cent) whose call was answered at the Cardiff office reported they were satisfied, with 61 per cent reporting they were very satisfied. Respondents whose calls were taken by the Liverpool office were least likely to be satisfied with the length of time it took of the call to be answered (65 per cent).

The length of time it took for the call to be answered was noted in a small proportion of the verbatim comments respondents made:

“Getting through to someone on the telephone is the only real issue I have”

“I have tried to get through to ACAS helpline on several occasions, each time it has taken most of the day (I prefer the helpline to internet). Once I have got through the staff are very helpful and courteous”

“I do find ACAS helpline extremely helpful we have used it for about 6 years. I do sometimes find it frustrating getting through, as you do need advice promptly to deal with certain issues”

As might be expected respondents became less satisfied with the length of time it took for their call to be answered the longer it took for them to get through. Table 3b shows the results.

Table 3b: Satisfaction with length of time for call to be answered by length of time for call to be answered				
	No time/ a few seconds (183) %	Less than 1 minute (316) %	1-5 minutes (364) %	More than 5 minutes (66) %
Very satisfied	86	56	9	5
Quite satisfied	10	36	48	24
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1	5	30	33
Quite dissatisfied	-	1	11	27
Very dissatisfied	-	2	1	8
SATISFIED	96	92	57	29
DISSATISFIED	-	3	12	35

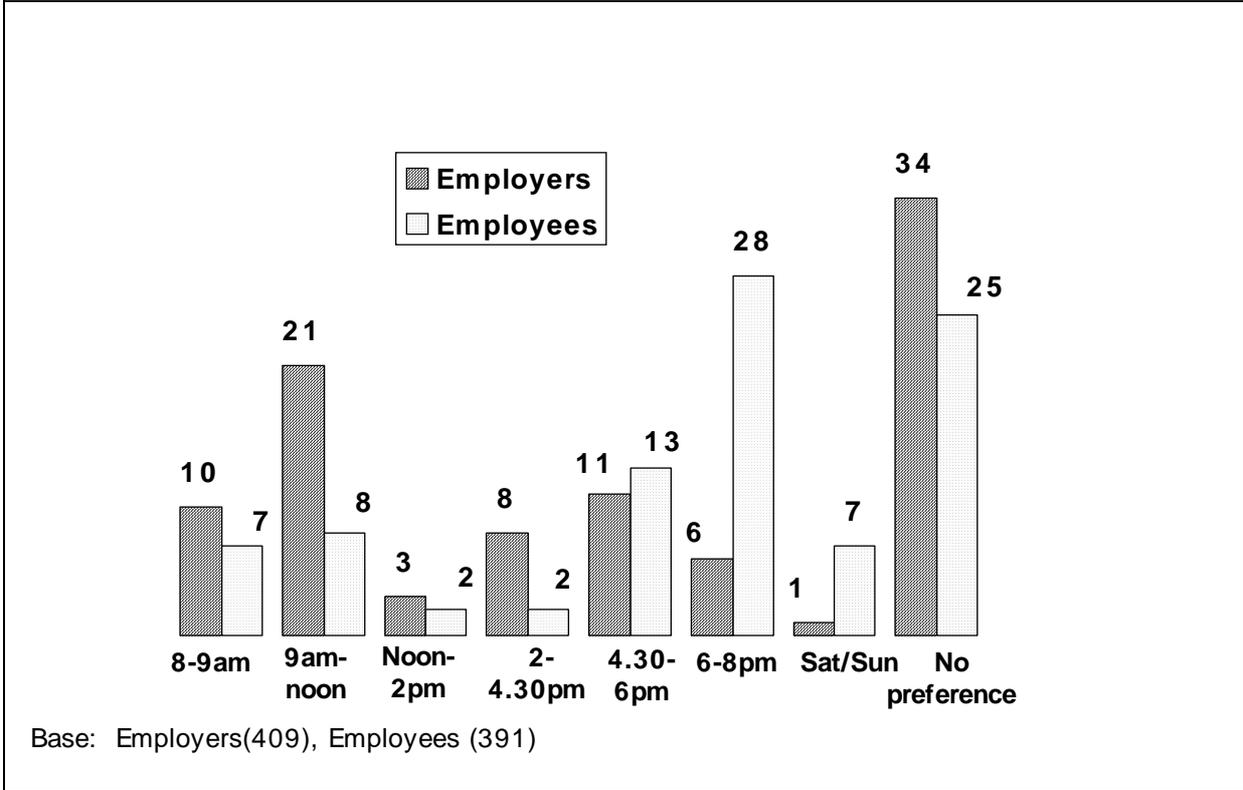
3.3 Most convenient time to call

The Helpline is currently staffed every weekday from 9.00am to 4.30pm. Acas is considering extending the opening hours so callers were asked to identify the most convenient time for them to call, the results are shown in table 3c below. Three in ten callers (30 per cent) did not have a preference and four in ten (41 per cent) selected a time outside the current opening times of the Helpline.

Table 3c: Most convenient time to call	
Base: All callers (959)	Total %
8 – 9am	8
9am – noon	14
Noon – 2pm	2
2pm – 4.30pm	5
4.30pm – 6pm	11
6pm – 8pm	18
Saturday/Sunday	4
No preference	30

Chart 3d provides a breakdown of the results amongst employees and employers. Just over a third of employers (34 per cent) and a quarter of employees (25 per cent) did not give a preference. The most convenient time for employees to call was in the evening; nearly three in ten employees (28 per cent) gave between 6 and 8pm as the most convenient time to call (compared to 33 per cent of employees in 2000). The most popular time for employers was between 9am and noon, which was selected by one fifth of employers (21 per cent) compared to just 8 per cent of employees.

Chart 3d - Most convenient time to call



The results suggest that employees may find it difficult to contact Acas during work hours and would perhaps prefer to contact Acas outside work hours. Some verbatim comments from respondents reflected this sentiment:

“Found it difficult to ring from work within the opening hours. Especially as the call was employee related. (Privacy was difficult to achieve within the workplace). Extended helpline hours would be advantageous”

“Excellent service provided, would appreciate helpline being available until around 6pm Mon – Friday”

“It would be a very good idea if we could email with a personal reply back as sometimes it is hard during working hours”

3.4 Subject of call

Callers were asked what subjects were covered by their enquiry. The results are shown in table 3d.

Table 3d: Subjects covered by call				
Base All callers (959)	Total (959)	Employer (409)	Employee (391)	On someone else's behalf (152)
Sick pay /absence	26	38	14	22
Notice period /pay	27	31	23	24
Holiday entitlement /pay	29	32	23	37
Maternity leave /pay	17	23	13	12
Parental leave	7	10	5	7
Time off for dependants	3	3	4	1
Paternity	4	6	1	4
Adoption	1	1	*	-
Race discrimination	1	1	1	1
Sex discrimination	2	1	2	3
Disability discrimination	2	3	2	3
Stress	4	3	6	1
Company take-over / merger	5	3	7	7
Dismissal	23	30	17	20
Lay offs	6	7	5	5
Redundancy /redundancy pay	27	26	28	24
Trade union issues	2	3	2	1
Rights of part time workers	11	11	11	13
Terms and conditions	18	17	19	18
Grievance procedures	13	15	11	9
Rights of casual workers	6	6	3	11
Bullying	5	3	7	4
Discipline	11	18	5	7
Wages	14	12	15	14
Working time regulations	10	11	8	16
Flexible working	4	3	6	2
Other	7	6	7	7

Calls to the Helpline covered a wide variety of subjects. Just under three in ten callers mentioned holiday entitlement/pay (29 per cent) and just over a quarter of callers mentioned notice periods/pay (27 per cent), redundancy/redundancy pay (27 per cent) or sick pay/ absence (26 per cent). Discrimination was the subject area that attracted the least enquiries with 2 per cent mentioning disability discrimination, 2 per cent mentioning sex discrimination and just 1 per cent mentioning race discrimination. Adoption was also unlikely to be mentioned with just 1 per cent mentioning this issue.

Some issues relating to new legislation which came into force in 2003 were the subject of fewer queries. For example: flexible working (4 per cent overall), paternity (4 per cent overall). there were however more enquiries about maternity leave/pay (17 per cent overall).

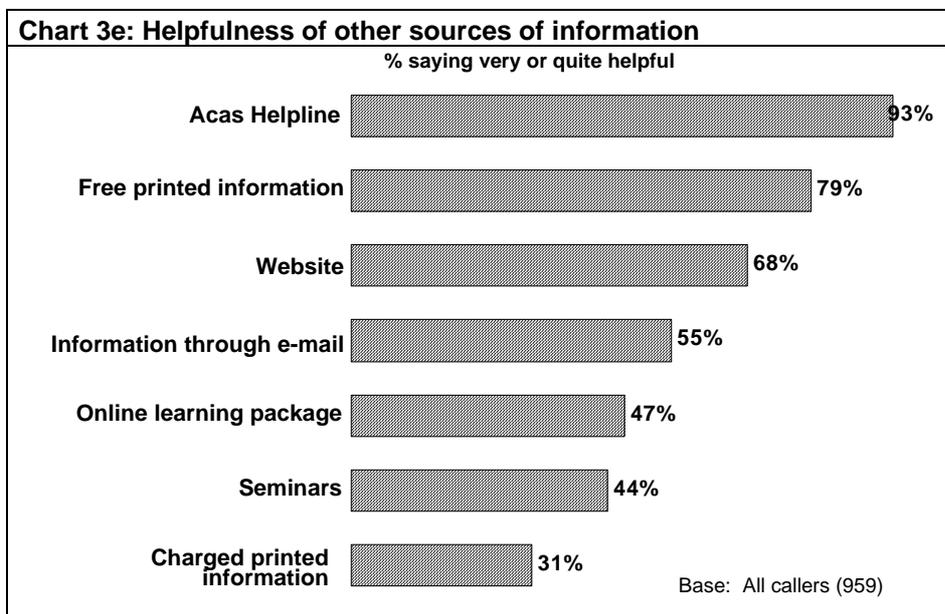
In general, employers tended to cover more issues in their calls than employees. Employers were significantly more likely to be calling about sick pay/absence (38 per cent compared to 14 per cent of employees), dismissal (30 per cent compared to 17 per cent) and notice period/pay (31 per cent compared to 23 per cent). This is not surprising as they are more likely to have the cases of several individuals in mind when calling.

3.5 Possible use of other information sources

Respondents were asked whether or not they had access to the Internet either at home or work, in order to ascertain whether or not they would be able to access services provided by Acas over the web. Four fifths of respondents (80 per cent) said they did have internet access (compared to 66 per cent in 2000), with 55 per cent saying they had access at home and the same proportion saying they had access at work. Employers were more likely to have access to the Internet than employees (90 per cent compared to 73 per cent of employees). This higher level of access was due to access at work rather than a difference in Internet penetration at home, 76 per cent of employers had access at work compared to 37 per cent of employees. Small businesses (under 50 employees) were less likely to have internet access than larger businesses (over 50 employees). Half of small businesses had internet access compared to 65 per cent of larger businesses.

All respondents who have internet access were asked whether they had tried to find the answer to their query on the Acas website before calling the helpline. Just over a quarter had checked the website before calling (26 per cent).

All callers were asked how helpful different ways of accessing information from Acas might be. Chart 3e below shows all respondents saying very or quite helpful for each of the possible methods.



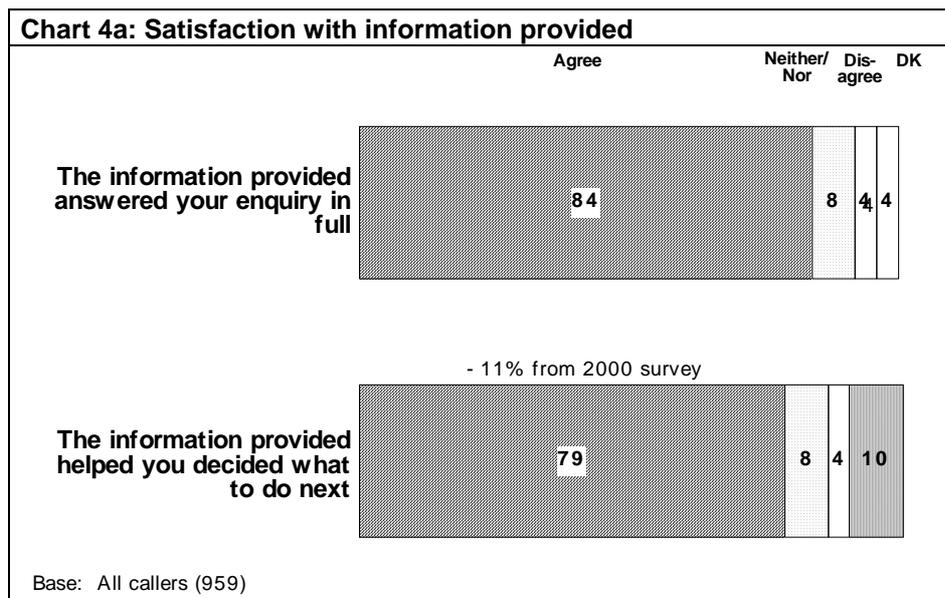
Nearly all callers to the Helpline said they found it helpful (93 per cent), which is obviously encouraging. Just under four fifths of callers (79 per cent) said that they would find free printed information helpful – unsurprisingly, this was significantly higher than those saying they would find charged printed information helpful (31 per cent).

4. QUALITY OF THE INFORMATION

This chapter looks at how satisfied the respondent was with the quality of the information that was provided and the assistance given by the member of staff. It also looks at any further action that was taken as a result of the call to the Helpline.

4.1 Satisfaction with information provided

All callers were asked to agree or disagree with two statements about the information that was provided to them. The results are shown in chart 4a below.



Over four fifths of respondents (84 per cent) agreed that the information answered their enquiry in full and over a third agreed strongly (36 per cent). This was slightly less than the 2000 survey (88 per cent agreed in 2000). Respondents whose call was taken by the Bristol office were most likely to agree with this statement (92 per cent) and the office with the least level of agreement was Fleet (78 per cent).

Just under four in five callers (79 per cent) agreed that the information provided helped them to decide what to do next, and just under a third agreed strongly (31 per cent). This was 11 per cent down from the 2000 survey (90 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement). Employees were less likely than employers to agree with this statement (73 per cent compared to 83 per cent of employers). Comments about the information received from Helpline staff were apparent in a small number of verbatim comments from respondents:

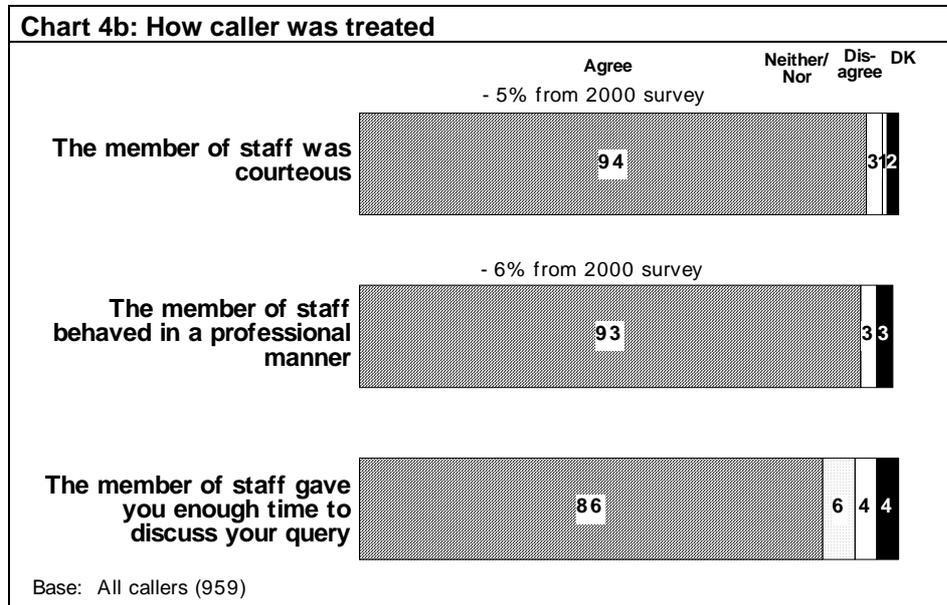
"I had two different answers to my question both left me somewhat confused with my issue"

"I received information from ACAS regarding sickness after maternity leave. I then advised my director however concerns were raised which resulted in me contacting ACAS again and getting completely different information. Not very helpful in decision making"

"In general found the helpline to be helpful but I have since found out that I was wrongly advised"

4.2 Helpline staff

All callers were also presented with statements about the member of Helpline staff that answered their query. The three statements in chart 4b below relate to how the caller feels the member of staff treated them.



Nearly all callers to the Helpline agreed that staff were courteous (94 per cent), behaved in a professional manner (93 per cent), these results however are slightly lower than the 2000 survey. These verbatim comments we received reflect such positive findings:

“The person I spoke to was very polite and helpful if I have any other questions, I won't hesitate to call ACAS again”

“On answering my call the young lady was extremely helpful & informative, and also very pleasant”

“The member of staff that I spoke to was very knowledgeable & extremely polite & helpful. If all of your staff are of the same nature then a lot of people will be as satisfied as I was with your service”

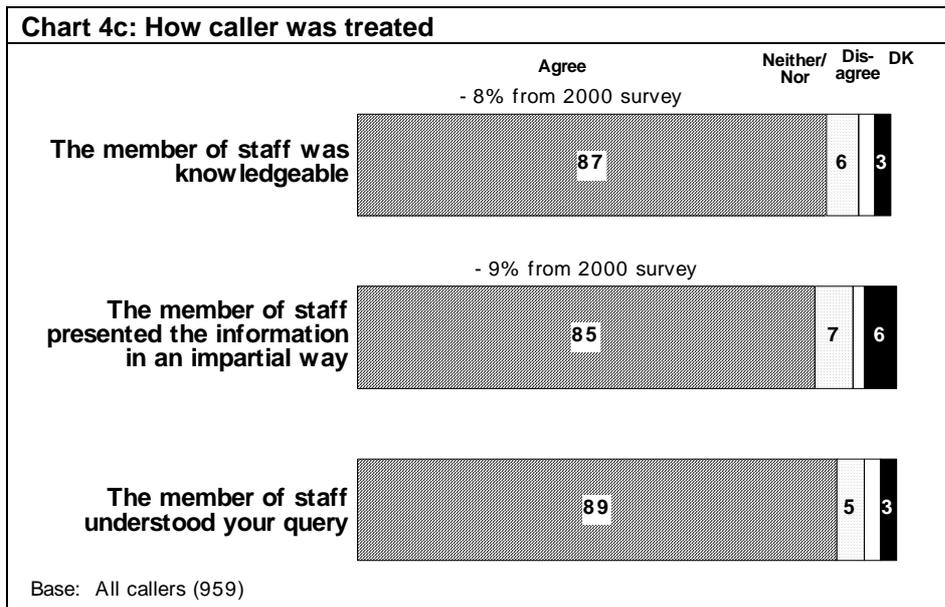
A lower proportion of callers felt that Helpline staff gave them enough time to discuss their query (86 per cent), this statement was not used in the 2000 survey. There did not appear to be any significant differences between the offices. We received a small number of comments from callers who felt they had not been given enough time by the Helpline advisor:

“Advisor spoke rather quickly found it difficult to follow what one was saying. Felt advisor was irritated at having to respect information”

“Although the member of staff was courteous and answered my initial query, I felt he cut me off abruptly. (I was about to ask an additional question based on the answer he gave me). Trying to get to the next call ?”

“I have found the workshops provided by ACAS to be extremely helpful. Sometimes the staff on the helpline are a little abrupt”

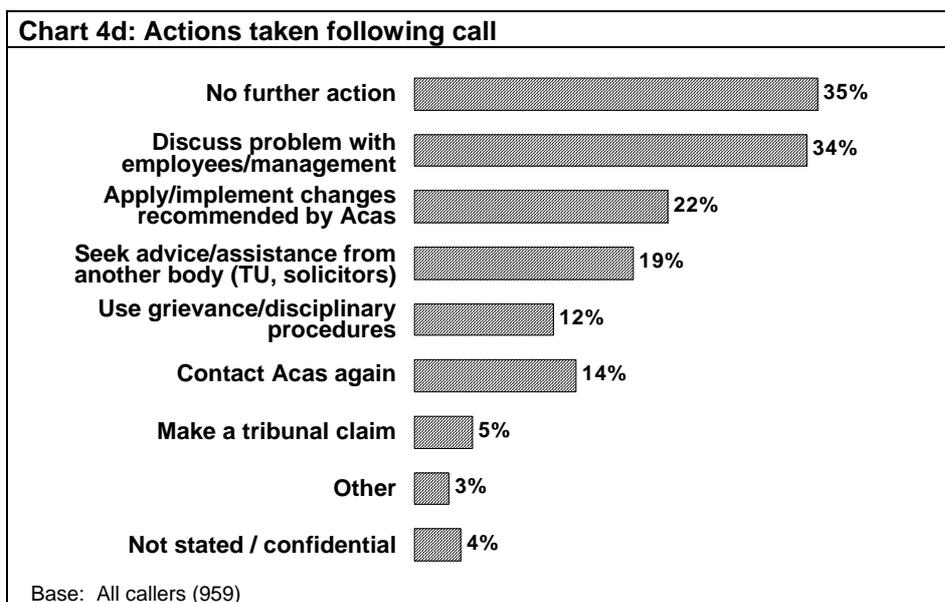
Callers were also presented with statements relating to the ability of the Helpline staff member to help them with their enquiry. The results are shown in chart 4c below.



Nearly nine in ten callers agreed that staff were knowledgeable (87 per cent), presented information in an impartial way (85 per cent) and understood the query (89 per cent). The first two statements were also used in the 2000 survey, where the results were more positive. Rather than a higher proportion of callers responding negatively to these statements it appears that this year they were more likely to report that they didn't know the answer or that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Employers were more likely than employees to agree with the statements (e.g. 91 per cent of employers agreed the member of staff was knowledgeable compared to 84 per cent of employees).

4.3 Further action

All callers were asked what further actions they had taken or would take following their call to the Helpline. Results are shown in chart 4d below.

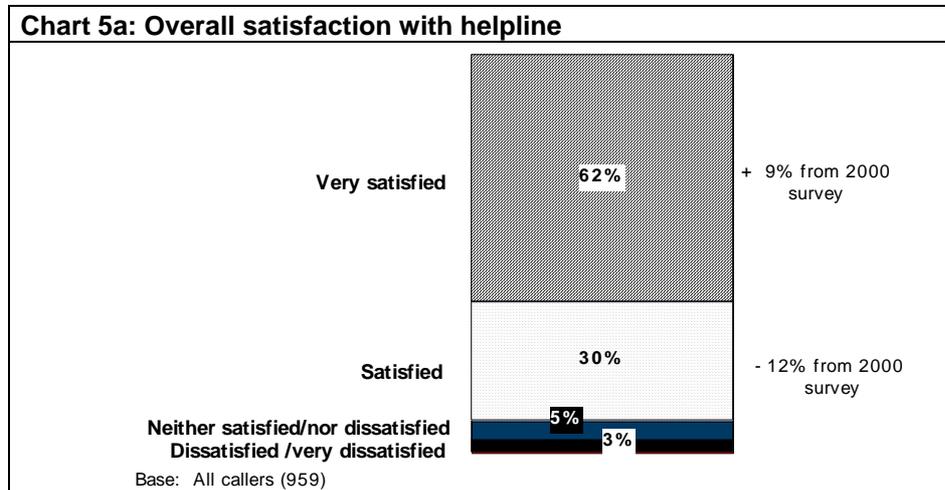


Just over a third of callers (34 per cent) said they would discuss the problem with management/employees and just over a fifth (22 per cent) said they would apply the changes recommended by Acas. There were some differences in the responses given between employers and employees. Employees were more likely than employers to report that they would seek advice from another body (25 per cent compared to 14 per cent of employers) and employers were more likely to say they would apply changes recommended by Acas (32 per cent compared to 12 per cent of employees). 12 per cent of callers said they would use internal procedures (17 per cent of employers and 7 per cent of employees). In relation to tribunal claims, 5 per cent of callers (all employees or former employees) said they would proceed with a tribunal claim, just four people (either employees or former employees) said they had decided against making a claim. Just over a third of callers (35 per cent) said that they would be taking no further action.

5. OVERALL SATISFACTION

This section looks at callers' overall satisfaction with the Helpline service. It also looks at whether or not respondents would use the service again in the future if they had any employment-related issue.

Chart 5a below shows the levels of overall satisfaction with the Helpline service.



Over nine in ten callers to the Helpline (92 per cent) said they were satisfied with the service. There was a significant rise in the proportion of callers who said they were very satisfied from just over a half in the 2000 survey (53 per cent) to just over three fifths (62 per cent) in 2003. Only 2 per cent of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the service with just nine respondents saying they were very dissatisfied.

There was some variation in the levels of satisfaction between the subgroups. Larger organisations (employing over 250 staff) were less likely to say they were satisfied than smaller employers (84 per cent compared to 94 per cent of smaller employers). Employees who called the Helpline were slightly less likely to say they were satisfied than employers (90 per cent compared to 95 per cent of employers). Amongst the offices, Leeds had the highest level of overall satisfaction (96 per cent) and Liverpool had the lowest level (85 per cent). Respondents whose call was taken by the Cardiff office were most likely to be very satisfied overall (76 per cent) - as base sizes are small these results should only be used as an indication.

The time it took for respondents' calls to be answered appears to have had an impact on overall levels of satisfaction. Just over four fifths of respondents (81 per cent) whose call was answered within a few seconds were very satisfied with the service provided by the Helpline, this compares to 69 per cent of respondents whose call was answered in less than one minute and half of respondents whose call took over one minute to be answered.

As might be expected given the high levels of satisfaction with the service nearly all respondents (97 per cent) said they would use the Helpline again if they had any employment related issues (99 per cent in the 2002 survey and 98 per cent in the 2000 survey).

As well as receiving positive scores for both overall satisfaction and future use, the Helpline also received almost uniformly positive verbatim comments. These are just a few examples:

“Always helpful - A very useful service, Thank You”

“ACAS continues to be a valuable resource. It's value increases as the working environment becomes more & more complicated”

“Just by saying to my employer that I had contacted ACAS, I was paid all my holiday entitlement. Thank You”

“The telephone helpline is an invaluable tool for new members to the HR department, in explaining details in full”

The Acas Helpline service has received very positive feedback from its customers in nearly all areas, and this high standard of service should be applauded and maintained.