

Acas Strategy 2016 - 2021

Revised April 2019

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Introduction

When the Acas strategy 2016-2021 was published in April 2016, we recognised '*that much can change over the course of five years*'. We therefore committed to continually reflect those changes in our aims and would, at an appropriate point, review our strategy. As we reach the end of the strategy's third year we reflect on our core strengths, our ambitions for the future and our progress so far, and describe how Acas will develop to meet the challenges we now face.

Acas' purpose

Acas exists to make working life better for everyone in Britain.

We support good relationships between employers and employees, which underpin business success. We provide free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees, on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. Through the delivery of our high quality training and tailored advice to employers we help them create better places to work. But when things go wrong we help by providing conciliation, to resolve workplace problems.

We believe that by facilitating a good working environment and practising these approaches within our own organisation, we can help improve working life across the country and make Acas a great place to work.

Our vision

To make working life better for everyone in Britain.

Our strategic aims

We will achieve our vision through three strategic aims:

- Aim 1: Advising on good practice in everyday working life
- Aim 2: Resolving disputes and managing conflict
- Aim 3: Influencing employment policy and debate

Our annual reports, laid in Parliament, will report on performance against our annual business plans that will align to the delivery of our strategic aims.

Our vision: to make working life better for everyone in Britain

Developing Acas for the future

In 2016 we set out to make Acas the leading impartial authority on workplace relationships and effectiveness, providing a unique combination of services to help build thriving workplaces and working lives.

To continue to deliver our ambition, Acas needs to remain alert and relevant to the changes in the world of work and continue to develop and innovate the services we provide, to ensure our ongoing relevance.

The following describes what we believe will be the key changes to the 'world of work' over the next few years and reports the progress we have made since 2016.

The combination of these factors has helped us to refresh our vision and strategic aims and our plans to achieve them (see Annex A).

The changing world of work

- **The future UK relationship with the European Union (EU).** The changing relationship with the EU will impact the labour market with possible changes in demand for our services.
- **The government's focus on productivity and 'Good Work' through its Industrial Strategy.** We will provide insight into how employers can continue to improve their offer to employees.
- **New contractual arrangements** will give rise to more complex employment relationships and potential for uncertainty and conflict.
- **Technological innovation** will drive new business models and create new people management challenges.
- **Social media** is changing workplace communications, challenging traditional systems for effectively involving employees. Trade unions enable engagement and representation but they are not found in all workplaces. Employee 'voice' will remain crucial in enabling employers and employees to work together to improve business.
- **The law** shapes the employment relationship. As we look to the immediate future, matters such as the Trade Union Act, legal developments arising from the Taylor Review, equality, and harassment in the workplace are likely to have implications for the role and activities we carry out.

All of these developments present challenges to organisations and individuals. Helping employers and employees to understand their implications is central to Acas' role, as is providing support in developing solutions and sharing good practice about what, in our experience, makes working life better.

Progress made

We know that the changing environment in which we operate requires a flexible and adaptable approach. We're determined to continue to provide high quality and high impact services that are responsive to customer needs. Since 2016 we have made progress reshaping our services and continue to transform how we work, to make sure that we're able to deliver a high quality service.

Our vision: to make working life better for everyone in Britain

Our progress includes:

- growing our advice services; creating new online advice and restructuring our helpline.
- redesigning our individual dispute resolution service to provide a faster, more responsive service to our customers. This will help us meet the sharp increase in demand for conciliation after the removal of Employment Tribunal fees
- using technology and investment in digitally provided services to reach a wider audience; for instance through webinars and e-learning, guidance on our website and engagement in social media.
- using the insight gained from our extensive work with employers and employees to influence the debate on employment relations issues. Also to offer insightful commentary, for example by feeding into the Taylor review.
- evidence from independent evaluation that our work is effective and highly regarded. We also know that our impact goes beyond the immediate customer. The most recent impact assessment demonstrated that for every £1 invested in Acas, £13 is saved for the economy.
- developing new products and services to support employers in handling challenging workplace issues, such as mental health. These help them to improve their good work offer to employees and also help promote the benefits of good work.

During this time we have experienced high demand for both advice and conciliation. From April 2015 to March 2018 we have:

- increased visits to our website from 9.9 million to 12 million visits per year, while developing a streamlined web based advice service.
- maintained outcomes during an increase of users through our telephone, webchat and helpline online channels from 943,000 to 1.3 million.
- increased the promotion of a settlement in collective disputes in which Acas is involved from 88% to 92%.

Future development

How we develop Acas will be vital in achieving our strategic aims. We are building on a strong foundation rooted in our statutory duties, and our reputation for expertise and impartiality. We recognise that crucial to our success will be our people, their commitment, professionalism and knowledge. To continue to provide an excellent public service, we will deliver our services through a diverse, engaged and capable workforce. To ensure our services remain relevant, we will continue to respond to changes in the world of work, listen to our stakeholders, reflect their expectations and needs in the services we offer, and how we deliver them.

What we will achieve

By 2021 we plan to have developed:

- improved digital services that integrate our suite of advice channels and a re-designed conciliation service relevant to the needs of our customers.

Our vision: to make working life better for everyone in Britain

- a flexible and responsive organisation, which is a great place to work for our people.
- widespread recognition for our expertise.

How we will achieve it

Collaboration

- With partners across: government; businesses; our social partners such as the TUs and employer bodies; and the private and third sectors, e.g. academics and employee representatives.
- Use our unique insights with stakeholders to influence developments of workplace policy.

Efficiency

- Deliver at pace and innovate, supported by a streamlined governance process.
- Constantly look for efficiency and value for money.

People

- Continuously support and develop our people, so that they have the skills and capability to deliver professional excellence and reflect the best of Civil Service talent.
- Build an inclusive and engaged culture that is supportive, representative, and draws from a diverse pool of talent.

Change

- Use information, knowledge, insight, and technology to improve our services and corporate functions so that they are relevant to the needs of customers, deliver at pace, focus on emerging priorities, and are sustainable.
- Underpin the changes we make with our organisational values and good practice in change leadership and management.

Acas' Strategic Plan 2016 - 2021

Our vision: to make working life better for everyone in Britain



1. Advising on good practice in everyday working life

What we will achieve

- Improve individual and organisational performance and increase awareness of employee wellbeing.
- Improve good workplace behaviours that create a positive, efficient and productive working environment.

What we will do

- Set standards and provide good practice guidance, to help employers and employees understand their rights and responsibilities and develop positive working relationships.
- Provide managers and employee representatives with the knowledge, practical skills and confidence to deal with employment issues.
- Review and adapt our services and use a wide range of channels to increase the number of employers and employees who use our services.



2. Resolving disputes and managing conflict

What we will achieve

- Resolve conflict as early as possible, to avoid negative impacts on organisational effectiveness and efficiency, as well as reducing the personal impact on people.
- Manage conflict effectively using informal approaches, backed up with clear formal procedures.

What we will do

- Provide timely and effective conciliation, arbitration and mediation services to resolve work disputes
- Promote the benefits of early and alternative dispute resolution, and work with employers, employees and employee representatives to reduce the risk of future conflict at work.
- Help organisations acquire the capability to manage conflict, and support individual managers to have the personal skills to respond confidently to potential and actual disputes.



3. Influencing employment policy and debate

What we will achieve

- Make a valuable contribution to the development of public policy affecting the world of work.
- Use our unique insight into relationships at work, to highlight the behaviours and approaches that can make a difference to organisational effectiveness and the quality of working life.

What we will do

- Develop new Acas guidance and services that meet our customers' needs, using our insight and research.
- Engage stakeholders and influencers through a range of channels, including policy papers and events. To shape thinking on emerging trends and highlight practical solutions.
- Initiate debate that creates an environment of shared understanding and develops consensus on policy and good practice solutions.