

Research Paper

A survey to assess the impact of Acas Open Access training services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, Ecorys (formerly ECOTEC Research & Consulting) was commissioned by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) to assess the impact of its Open Access training services.

Acas' Open Access training involves courses which are advertised and open to anyone. The training is split into five 'product types': Key Point sessions; Getting it Right sessions; In Depth sessions; Conferences and ad-hoc 'Talks' to particular groups. This study focused on the first four.

The methodology involved a postal survey with delegates who had attended Open Access training events. This was supported by a web option for those who preferred to complete the survey that way. Responses were received from 1,393 delegates, which was a response rate of 34 per cent. In addition to the survey, five organisational case study interviews were carried out to explore in more depth the impact of the training.

This section of the report sets out the key findings from this study.

KEY FINDINGS

(i) Reach

Characteristics of the Open Access training services

5,786 delegates took part in Acas's Open Access training between 1st March to August 2010, the period of interest to this study. Over half (56 per cent) were involved in Key Point sessions, 29 per cent in Getting it Right sessions, 8 per cent in Conferences and 7 per cent in In-Depth sessions.

Attendance Absence Management training events were the most popular. Just under two thirds (64 per cent) of the delegates had been involved in these events. The most popular topic by far (constituting the majority of all Attendance/Absence Management events) was the training on the new Statement of Fitness for Work or fit note. This is to do with the fact that on the 6th of April 2010, the process for notifying sickness absence, commonly known as a 'sick note', was replaced by the 'fit note', which aims to focus on what employees may be able to do at work rather than what they cannot do.

Survey Demographics

Just over two thirds (67 per cent) of Acas training delegates involved in the survey were from organisations that employed up to 249 employees (SMEs), 12 per cent were from those that employed 250+ employees and nearly a quarter (22 per cent) from organisations that employed more than 500 people.

The survey findings highlight that delegates based at large organisations (500+ employees) tend to favour more intensive sessions. A third (33 per cent) of these

delegates had attended In Depth sessions compared to just over 20 per cent for each of the other sessions (Conferences, Key Points and Getting it Right). In contrast, those from SMEs (up to 249 employees) were less likely to be interested in In Depth sessions. The findings highlight that the majority of those involved in Getting it Right sessions (71 per cent) were from SME organisations compared to just over half (54 per cent) of those involved in In-Depth sessions, the lowest proportion across all the four sessions attended by this group. Under two thirds (62 per cent) of the delegates from SMEs had attended Key Point sessions and 72 per cent had participated in Conferences.

Satisfaction with the training/Recommendations

The Acas 2010 survey explored the extent to which delegates were satisfied with Open Access training. Evidence from the survey suggests that satisfaction remains high and in line with the 2005/06 evaluation. The vast majority of all delegates (93 per cent) were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the training. The satisfaction ratings for the 2006 evaluation were slightly higher, 97 per cent of delegates were either satisfied or very satisfied with the training, however, as per this 2010 survey, 58 per cent of these reported that they were very satisfied with the training. The reason for this marginally lower overall satisfaction in 2011 is likely to be that the satisfaction question wording has changes ('satisfied' changed to 'fairly satisfied') and could also be due to different subjects being popular at 2006 compared to 2011, as satisfaction does vary by training topic.

There were only marginal differences across satisfaction ratings in relation to the different product types (Key Point Sessions (92 per cent), Conferences (91 per cent), In-Depth sessions (94 per cent) and Getting it Right Sessions (94 per cent)), however, the findings for the 2010 survey are consistent with internal knowledge within Acas that suggests that Key Point sessions on the whole do tend to generate slightly lower satisfaction ratings compared to other Acas training sessions. Further analysis to explore this suggests that delegates who had attended Key Point sessions were as likely to be 'satisfied' using the broad definition but just over half (55 per cent) of the delegates who attended Key Point sessions reported that they were 'very satisfied' with the training compared to an average of 60 per cent across all the other sessions. The shortfall in those 'very satisfied' was made up for in the proportion who were 'fairly satisfied' with the training: a higher proportion (37 per cent) indicated that they were 'fairly satisfied' with Key Points compared to 33 per cent for each of the In Depth and Getting it Right sessions and 30 per cent for Conferences.

The survey also highlights that the majority were likely to recommend the training to their colleagues. Eighty five per cent reported that they were very likely or quite likely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager.

(ii) Outcomes and impacts of the training

Objectives of the Open Access training

The survey evidence highlights that the reasons why delegates attended the training were: improving their knowledge of the subject covered by the course (81 per cent gave this as one of their reasons and 21 per cent as their main reason); learning how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subject

area (68 percent overall, with 21 per cent as their main reason); learning how to respond to a situation or problem that may occur in the future (55 per cent overall, with 13 per cent at their main reason); and reviewing or revising any existing policies or practices to ensure best practice (53 per cent overall, with 9 per cent as their main reason).

Comments from those who were interviewed as part of the case studies provide further insights into reasons why delegates attended the training:

"... learn a bit more about how Acas recommended we do investigations for disciplinary and grievances and other staff related issues and then utilise that to develop their own in house investigation training.."

"You hear about an increase in cases, and we [in this country] appear to be heading for more tribunals. We want to avoid that and thought it would be good for us to go on a course."

Outcomes of the training

The training outcomes for those involved in the survey were high. Nine out of ten delegates (92 per cent) agreed that they had achieved a good understanding of the subject area addressed at the training; a similar proportion (89 per cent) felt they were more confident in dealing with the matters relating to the course topic they had attended. In addition, approximately three quarters (75 per cent) were able to deal more effectively with matters relating to the subjects addressed at the course, and just over three quarters (78 per cent) felt they were more able to prevent problems relating to the subjects addressed in the course.

Interviews with representatives from organisations involved in the case study work also highlight the value that some delegates placed on the training. For example, those involved in the training felt they were now *'better informed'* and therefore more able to deal effectively with employment issues that could potentially arise in their organisation, others felt they had a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training, and as a result more confident in dealing with matters linked to the training.

Impact of training on delegates' organisations

Overall, a significant proportion (76 per cent) of the delegates involved in the Open Access training had reviewed, revised or introduced one or more new policy or practice in their respective organisations or planned to do so¹.

Of the 1,374 delegates who attended training between 1 March to 31 August 2010 and responded to the question:

- Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) had reviewed one or more policy or practice since attending the training
- Over half (53 per cent) had revised one or more policy or practice

¹ This was lower than the previous evaluation (2005/06) where 88 per cent indicated that they had made changes to their HR policies and practices. It is hard to say whether this is a real difference, as the wording used for this question has changed since 2006, or the reason for this difference if it is real, which may have been due to the different mix of training topics and training types in demand at the time of the respective surveys.

- Just under a quarter (23 per cent) had introduced one or more new policy or practice
- Over a quarter (27 per cent) planned to do so in the near future.

The changes to policies and practices made by delegates were mainly with regards to their Absence and Attendance management policies, reflecting the fact that the majority of the delegates had attended training in this area. Approximately two thirds (65 per cent) reported that they had made changes to their Absence and Attendance management policies. In addition, over a quarter (27 per cent) had made changes to their Discipline and Grievance policies (the second most common area) which was also the second most common attended event subject after Attendance and Absence management training.

The survey findings also highlight that changes made by delegates had led to positive outcomes in their organisations. The majority (80 per cent) reported that the training had led to improvements in at least one of the areas listed separately below:

- Communication within the organisation – approximately a third (30 per cent) felt the changes made had improved communication within their organisation
- Relations between management and employees – over a quarter (26 per cent) reported an improvement in the relations between management and employees
- Leadership and management skills of managers – just under a quarter (24 per cent) felt the changes had improved the leadership and management skills of line managers in their organisations
- Staff Absenteeism - 24 per cent felt the changes made had reduced staff absenteeism in their organisations.

Comments in relation to the case study work also illustrate the longer term impact of the training as outlined below:

" ... What we've seen is a significant reduction in the number of disciplinaries relating to misconduct and from grievances relating to employment relationships or the manager/employee relationships."

(iii) Conclusions and Recommendations

The study highlights that on average a significant proportion (76 per cent) of the delegates had reviewed, revised, introduced or planned to make some changes to their HR policies and practices. For those that had made changes, the majority (80 per cent) felt that the changes had led to positive outcomes in their organisations, including improving communication within the organisation, better relations between management and employees, improvement in the leadership and management skills of managers and reduced staff absenteeism.

There were no significant gaps in relation to the development needs of participants with a majority (93 per cent) reporting that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the training. The only criticism for the minority (4 per cent) who were dissatisfied was that they felt the training had been too generic, suggesting that some delegates may have been keen to address specific areas that the training did not cover.

Hence in relation to overall recommendations, Acas may want to consider the following:

- Discussing with their trainers the possibility of having the needs of delegates assessed more thoroughly prior to delivery, so that the training can be tailored to delegates needs where appropriate. This will benefit delegates from smaller organisations who are less likely to have written policies and therefore may be more interested in more in depth sessions.
- Expanding the description currently provided for different product types by including the type of organisations that are more likely to benefit from a particular product type; again this will ensure that delegates are well informed about the type of product that is likely to address their specific needs.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ecorys (formerly ECOTEC Research & Consulting) was commissioned in October 2010 to assess the impact of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) Open Access training services. This report presents the findings of this study.

1.1 Overview of Acas Open Access Training Services

Acas is a non-departmental body which is funded by the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS). It was founded in 1975 and became a statutory body in 1976. Acas was set up to promote the improvement of employment relations throughout Great Britain. It is primarily known for its work in preventing and resolving workplace disputes but also offers a range of other products and services aimed at improving organisations and working life through better employment relations².

Currently Acas delivers a range of services which have the purpose of enhancing working relationships between employers, HR professionals and groups of workers. This includes providing independent advice to employers and employees, dispute resolution service to groups of workers or employers, and a national programme of training to businesses and HR professionals.

Training programmes held by Acas include a) Workplace Training events which are delivered to staff within individual organisations and usually tailored to the needs of the organisation and, of relevance to this study, b) Open Access training which involves courses advertised and open to anyone.

Acas utilises its knowledge of employment relations, employment legislation and good practice to provide Open Access events aimed at different delegates, ranging from those from very small businesses with little or no Human Resources (HR) experience to larger businesses with HR Professionals who want to explore issues and to be updated on the latest developments in employment legislation. The programme is centrally co-ordinated with all courses being based upon a national framework and places can be booked on-line through the Acas national website. However, the day-to-day delivery and administration of the training programme is organised through the network of Acas offices across the UK.

The Open Access training programme is designed to meet the delegate's on-going training needs, with subject areas such as how to employ people, bullying, harassment, equality and diversity, attendance/ absence management and discipline and grievance³. It is also designed to cover new issues such as the introduction of new legislation with the emphasis on encouraging good practice, developing participants' understanding of legal compliance.

By its nature, Acas training covers topics which are of relevance to organisations at the current time and thus there is a large variation over time in the proportions

² Acas Corporate Plan 2009-2011

³ <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1400>

of delegates attending any given topic. Current or planned new employment legislation may lead to a new Acas training course which becomes the most popular course for a relatively short period of time. Other Acas courses, such as courses on Employment Law and Performance Management have more stable attendance figures over time than the aforementioned 'hot topics'.

Acas has a long history of training in 'Attendance / Absence Management' but the popularity of this subject soared to 64 per cent of the overall number of events since related legislation changes were imminent in March 2010. In the period covered by the survey (1 March – 31 August 2010), the most popular topic by far (and the majority of all 'Attendance / Absence Management' events) was the training on the new Statement of Fitness for Work, or 'fit-note' (which is a Medical Statement that GPs now issue). It replaces the old process for notifying sickness absence, commonly known as a 'sick note', and aims to focus on what an employee may be able to do at work rather than what they cannot do.

On the 6 April 2010 the sick note was replaced by the fit note because evidence has shown that work is generally good for your health and that often going back to work can actually aid a person's recovery. Doctors are able to advise people who are on sick leave for over 7 days whether, with extra support from their employer, they could return to work earlier⁴.

The Acas fit-note training helps delegates to:

- understand the changes and the benefits of the new fit-note approach
- understand how the new Statement of Fitness for Work fits into the wider issue of an employee's health and wellbeing
- train managers to handle difficult conversations in the workplace with Acas training
- use mediation to resolve conflict and help people get back to work
- effectively deal with contractual implications and transitional arrangements, disagreements and confidentiality

The training is aimed at those dealing with sickness, absence or attendance at work to help employers and managers understand what they will mean for them.

As mentioned earlier, Acas training responds to issues of the day and the proportion of Acas 'fit-note' training will therefore decline over time and new subjects of the day will appear.

1.2 Evaluation aims and objectives

The study sought to evidence the impacts of the Acas Open Access training services. It also aimed to provide evidence of Acas's compliance with its Service Level Agreement (SLA) with its funding department, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in relation to delivering reliable evidence on the '*% of delegates reporting that the training provided by Acas has resulted in a change in policy or practice*'.

⁴ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote>

The core aim was therefore to *'provide evidence on the impacts of Acas Open Access training, and produce evidence in relation to its Key Performance Indicator on the impact of the training'*.

To address the aim of the study, Ecorys developed an evaluation framework (Table 1.1) which set out the key objectives and questions that will need to be addressed.

Table 1.1 Key evaluation questions

Key Objectives	Sample of research questions
Deliver reliable evidence on the Key Performance Indicator <i>"% of delegates reporting that the training provided by Acas resulted in a change in policy or practice"</i>	How many delegates reported that the Open Access training had resulted in a particular change in policy or practice?
	What aspects of the organisation's policy or practice were changed as a result of the training?
	To what extent has the training impacted on the policy and practices of the organisation?
Assess the impacts of the training on the individual delegate and their respective organisations and collect data to feed into assessment of the economic impact of Acas	To what extent has the training supported the policy and practices of the delegates who participated and their respective organisations?
	Were there any unanticipated impacts of the training? (i.e. in relation to added value/ additional programme effect over and above the stated outcomes?)
	To what extent has the training improved practice in the organisation of delegates who attended the training, thereby avoiding legal disputes that may have proved costly for the organisations concerned?
Explore the longer term impact and effectiveness of the Open Access Training	What have been the longer term impacts of the training on the individuals and the organisations concerned?
	To what extent has the training impacted on the longer term policies and practices of the organisations concerned?
Compare the impact and effectiveness of different types of Acas training events	Overall, how effective were the different training events? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors may have influenced the delivery of the Open Access training and therefore its effectiveness? • What worked well and less well and why?
Identify any gaps in the training and highlight any areas for service improvement	Were there any significant gaps in the training relation to the development needs of the participants?
	What aspects of the training could be improved?

1.3 Methodology

The methodology used to assess the impact of the Open Access Training services was structured under five key research tasks. Further details of our approach are set out under subsequent sections.

1.3.1 Task One: Inception and scoping meeting

An early inception and scoping meeting was held with Acas prior to the start of the study to discuss and confirm the tasks, inputs, timings and outputs and to discuss and agree on the questions to be used for the survey to assess the impact of the Open Access training services. A detailed inception report was submitted to Acas following on from the inception meeting.

1.3.2 Task Two: Scoping stage/data review

The scoping stage involved the development of a sampling framework to reflect the population of interest. This included a review of the sampling frame available for the survey work to inform the sampling strategy for the survey.

1.3.3 Task Three: Quantitative evaluation (Survey Methodology)

1.3.3.1 Sampling strategy

The sample was selected to include delegates attending Acas's Open Access training events over a six month period - March to August 2010. A decision was made not to go beyond a six month period to ensure that respondents could still remember the training they had been on. A multi-sampling approach was adopted in order to maximise the amount of cases in the dataset for sub-group analysis at the reporting stage. This involved 'down-weighting' 'sick note to fit-note' courses from all courses by using a stratified sample approach, and carrying out a census of all courses other than 'fit note' courses. The overall sample therefore consisted of a census of:

- 1,908 delegates who have not been on an Attendance/Absence management course;
- 239 who have been on an Attendance/Absence management course and another course; and
- 310 who have attended Attendance/Absence management courses other than 'fit notes'

Added to this was a stratified sample of half of the delegates (1,657) who had only been on a 'fit note' course by Acas regional office and course type (Key Points, In-depth, Getting it right, Conference/talks). Hence, the overall sample involved a census of 2,458 delegates plus a stratified sample of 1,657 delegates thus giving us a total of 4,115 delegates. A detailed table of the sampling approach has been provided in the Technical report.

1.3.3.2 Developing survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was developed in partnership with Acas. To track progress of the Open Access training programme, and to allow analysis of the progress of the programme, this study incorporated questions used under previous surveys in 2001 and 2006, where appropriate. It also included new questions to explore more precisely the value and impact of the training on delegates who were involved.

The questionnaire used for the survey included mostly closed questions and was designed to take 10 minutes to complete. Open ended questions were included where necessary to obtain verbatim quotes to support the findings.

1.3.3.3 Fieldwork approach

The fieldwork was conducted by means of a postal survey administered to just over 4,000 delegates who had attended Open Access training events. This was supported by a web option to provide an alternative option for delegates to complete the survey. A copy of the questionnaire with a covering letter which included a link to the web version of the survey was posted out to delegates. Unique reference numbers were provided to allow responses to be monitored. One postal reminder and three email reminders were sent to boost response rate.

1.3.3.4 Preparing the survey database for analysis

Coding was carried out manually and entered into an SPSS file to produce tables and cross tabulations for the analysis. Random checks on data inputting were carried out in the course of the process.

1.3.4 Task Five: Analysis and Reporting

The analysis and reporting element under this task involved drawing together the responses received from the survey, coding these responses and pulling out key tables findings which have been presented in the next section.

An economic impact assessment of Open Access training was also conducted, with part of the questionnaire dedicated to collecting economic-impact data. The findings will feed into an ongoing assessment of the economic impact of Acas services.

1.3.5 Task Five: Qualitative evaluation: Case Study Work

The final task involved organisational case study work with selected delegates who participated in the survey to explore in more depth the extent to which the changes made to their policies and practices have impacted on their respective organisations. The case study work involved in depth interviews with delegates from five organisations who were involved in the Open Access training and colleagues nominated by the delegates who are responsible for HR policies in their organisation.

1.4 Data presentation, rounding and reporting

Throughout this report percentages are rounded to the nearest full percentage point, but reported in the tables up to one decimal point. Where base sizes fall below the minimum of 50, we have stressed that caution is needed in terms of the significance of findings given the small sample sizes involved. All the base line figures for the analysis are outlined under the tables and charts presented in the report. Where relevant, the figures used in the report are based just on valid responses.

In the survey we gave respondents the opportunity to provide comments, some of which have been illustrated in the report. These comments should be taken as examples of a range of opinions, but not statistically representative of the strength or depth of opinion.

1.5 Structure of the report

The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2 'Reach'** outlines the general demographics of the delegates involved in the Open Access training and their overall satisfaction with the training
- **Section 3 'Outcomes and impact of the training'** discusses the impact of the Open Access training on the delegates and their respective organisations (the economic impact of the training will not be covered in this report as it will form part of a wider project on the economic impact of Acas services)
- **Section 4 'Conclusions and recommendations'** outlines the key conclusions of the study in line with the key research questions and recommendations on future training activities

2.0 Reach

Summary

- Over the study period, over 5,000 delegates participated in the Acas Open Access events. The training received covered a wide range of subject areas and was delivered through a number of different event types, but the most common kind of events were “Key Point” sessions, and the most common subject of the training received was Attendance and Absence management.
- Acas training is aimed at small to medium size organisations reflecting the breakdown of the type of organisations involved in the 2010 survey. Just over two thirds (67 per cent) of the delegates who were involved in the survey were from organisations that employed up to 249 employees (SMEs).
- For all types of session, delegates expressed a high degree of satisfaction (over 90 per cent were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied) with the training received and were likely to recommend the sessions to other people in their organisation.

This study focuses on delegates who participated in the Open Access training over a six month period (1 March 2010 to 31 August 2010). In this section, we report on the number of delegates that took part in the training over this period across the four product types and training events. We also use survey evidence to assess the level of participation across different organisations and outline a breakdown of delegates according to their role within these organisations. In addition, this section discusses delegates satisfaction with the training received.

2.1 Characteristics of the Open Access training services

The Open Access training involves courses which are advertised and open to anyone. They cover subjects such as how to employ people and the introduction of new legislation, with an emphasis on encouraging good practice as well as developing participants’ understanding of legal compliance. The training is split into five 'product types': Key Point sessions; Getting it Right sessions; In Depth sessions; Conferences and ad-hoc 'Talks' to particular groups. The study focused on the first four of these which can be defined as follows:

- **Key Point Sessions** - Short events covering the key issues on a particular subject in a clear, concise but brief way. These are intended to be most useful to small and medium sized organisations without access to HR specialists.
- **Getting It Right Sessions** - These events are aimed at the same audience and cover the same issues as 'Key Points Sessions' but they are usually longer and seek to allow delegates more time to explore the issues. They generally include more discussion time than key point sessions and involve interactive exercises to embed learning.
- **In-Depth Sessions** - These are designed for professionals, such as HR specialists and Trade Union Officers, who have an existing knowledge of employment legislation and good practice. They tend to be interactive, allowing delegates to explore issues and share views and experiences, while

aiming to ensure that those taking part are aware of the latest developments in terms of legislation and good practice.

- **Conferences** - These are one off events which focus on a particular subject and may be targeted at the needs of a particular group, or aim to showcase the full range of Acas services to a particular audience. However, they are usually attended by a larger number of delegates than other Acas events and have a more varied format.

Over the period 1 March to 31 August 2010 that the evaluation focused on, 5,786 delegates took part in the Open Access training. However, as per the sampling strategy outlined in the methodology section, a multi-sampling approach was adopted in order to maximise the amount of cases in the dataset for sub-group analysis at the reporting stage. Hence the overall sample involved a census of 2,458 delegates plus a stratified sample of 1,657 delegates (a stratified sample of half of the delegates who had only been on a 'fit note' course, by Acas regional office and product type (Key Points, In-depth, Getting it right, Conference/talks), thus giving us a total of 4,115 delegates who were involved in the study. (More details on 'fit-note' training courses can be found in the introduction of this report.)

In total, 1,393 responses were received from the Acas 2010 survey, representing about a quarter (24 per cent) of all delegates who were involved in the training within the period that the evaluation focused on, and a response rate of 34 per cent from the survey. The following table outlines how the number of delegates and the number of survey respondents was distributed across the four product types.

Table 2.1 Number of delegates accessing Open Access Training in the period 1 March – 31 August 2010 and number of survey respondents, by product type

	Key Point Session	Getting It Right Session	In-Depth Session	Conference	Total
Number of delegates	3,281	1,672	452	381	5,786
Percentage of total delegates	56.7%	28.9%	7.8%	6.6%	100.0%
Number of survey respondents	692	469	151	81	1,393
Percentage of total respondents	49.7%	33.7%	10.8%	5.8%	100.0%
Survey respondents as a percentage of delegates	21.1%	28.1%	33.4%	21.3%	24.1%

Source: Acas monitoring data and Ecorys survey

With respect to the proportion that were involved in the Acas Open Access training within the period of interest to the study, Table 2.1 highlights that over half of the delegates (56 per cent) were involved in a Key Point Session, the least intensive training product, while a further 29 per cent undertook a Getting It Right Session. In comparison, attendance at In-Depth Sessions and Conferences was relatively low, accounting for 8 per cent and 7 per cent respectively of the total delegate population.

The proportion that responded to the survey across the four different product types broadly reflected this pattern with approximately half of the respondents having attended a Key Point session and a third (33 per cent) an In-Depth session. As per the population profile, the lowest proportion of responses was from those that had attended Conferences.

Comparisons with the previous Acas Open Access training survey of 2006 have been included later in the report. To offer insight in to these comparisons, the below Table 2.2 shows the number of responses by type of training in 2006 and this illustrates that that Key Points sessions make up a higher proportion of overall training sessions in 2011 than in 2006, at 50 per cent in 2011 compared with 34 per cent in 2006.

Table 2.2 Number of delegates responding to the 2006 Open Access Training by product type

	Key Point Session	Getting It Right Session	In-Depth Session	Conference	Total
Number of survey respondents	285	413	101	32	831
Percentage of total respondents	34.3%	49.7%	12.2%	3.9%	100.0%

Source: Acas Open Access Impact Survey 2006

Table 2.3 outlines the main events accessed by delegates who attended the Open Access training over the period of interest to the study. It highlights that the majority of delegates (64 per cent) were involved in Attendance/Absence management training. The majority of this training was delivered as Key Point sessions (over 78 per cent of the delegates attended this training as Key Point sessions). The proportions of those involved in the survey had a fairly similar composition: over half (52 per cent) of survey respondents had attended the Attendance/Absence Management training. However this figure may be slightly lower than the population as a whole due to down-weighting of 'sick note' to 'fit note' courses all of which are categorised under Attendance/Absence Management training. Despite this, it was agreed not to apply any weightings to the data. This was because the survey respondents' characteristics did not differ enough from the delegate characteristics from management information for weighting to be used, given the disadvantages of weighting. There were also some discrepancies identified between the courses respondents said they had been on and those recorded on the database. A decision was therefore taken to accept the answers given rather than rely on the database. The main effect of this

was to shift more people into the category who had attended an Attendance and Absence Management course and another course than would have been suggested by the database.

Table 2.3 Number of delegates accessing Open Access Training in the period 1 March – 31 August 2010, by event

	Number of delegates	Percentage of total delegates
Attendance / Absence Management	3,675	63.5%
Bullying and Harassment	66	1.1%
Change Management	101	1.7%
Conflict / Mediation / Relationship Issues	51	0.9%
Discipline and Grievance	507	8.8%
Employing People	13	0.2%
Employment Law (General)	384	6.6%
Equal Pay	10	0.2%
Equality and Diversity (General)	405	7.0%
Flexible Working, Hours and Holidays	1	0.0%
Investigations	10	0.2%
Other	78	1.3%
Performance Management	93	1.6%
Recruiting, Contracting and Employing People	183	3.2%
Redundancy	124	2.1%
Stress Management	15	0.3%
Supervision / First Line Management	51	0.9%
Working Families / Parental Rights	6	0.1%
Written Statements / Contracts	13	0.2%
Total	5,786	100.0%

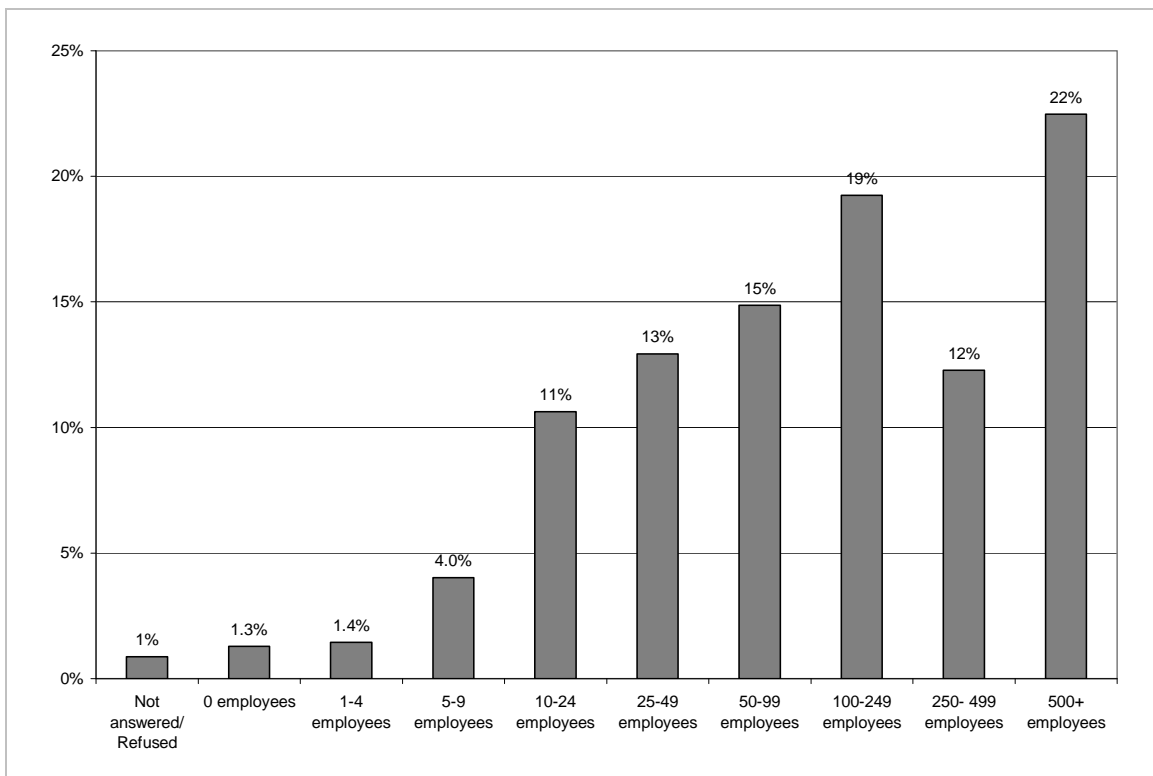
Source: Acas monitoring data

2.2 Survey demographics

Delegates from Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were more likely to attend training organised by Acas. Just over two thirds (67 per cent) of the delegates who were involved in the survey were from organisations that employed up to 249 employees (SMEs), 12 per cent were from organisations that employed 250 to 499 employees and nearly a quarter (22 per cent) were from organisations employing more than 500 people (Fig 2.1).

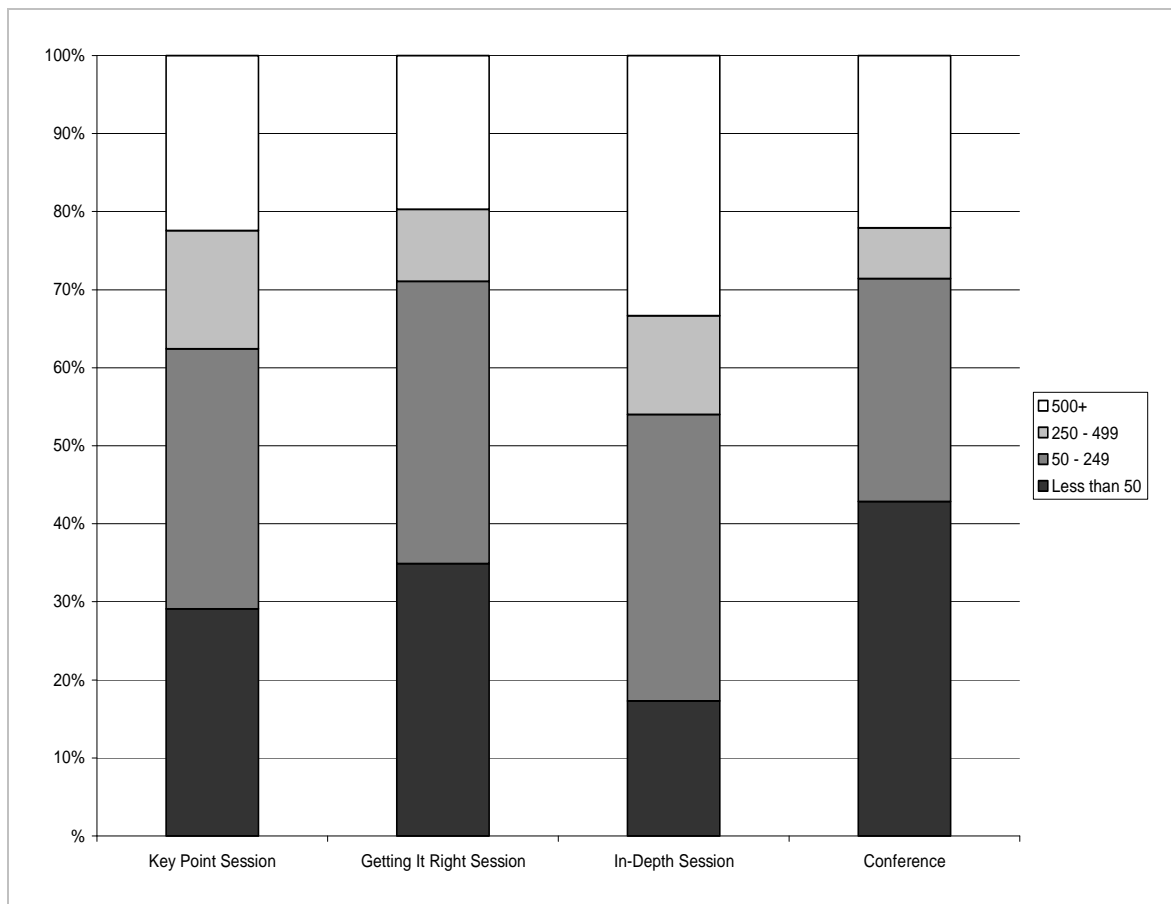
The survey findings suggest that organisations with 500+ employees tend to favour more intensive sessions (Fig 2.2). Approximately a third (33 per cent) of the delegates from organisations that employed more than 500 people had attended In-Depth sessions compared to just over 20 per cent for each of the other sessions (Conferences, Key Point and Getting it Right). In contrast, those from SMEs were less likely to be interested in In Depth sessions. The findings highlight that the majority of those involved in Getting it Right sessions (71 per cent) were from SME organisations compared to just over half (54 per cent) of those involved in In-Depth session, the lowest proportion across all the four sessions attended by this group. Under two thirds (62 per cent) of the delegates from SMEs had attended Key Point sessions and 72 per cent had participated in Conferences.

Figure 2.1 Survey respondents by number of employees in organisation



Source: Ecorys survey; Base n = 1,393

Figure 2.2 Product type by number of employees



Source: Ecorys survey, Base n=1,381

A significant proportion of the delegates who were involved in the survey were human resource or personnel specialists. As highlighted in Fig. 2.3, over half of the responses were from delegates who were human resource or personnel specialists and just over a quarter (28 per cent) had a managerial or supervisory role within their respective organisations. The findings also highlight that just over half (58 per cent) of the delegates who were human resource or personnel specialists had attended In Depth Sessions (Table 2.4) and a higher proportion (63 per cent) had been involved in Key Point sessions.

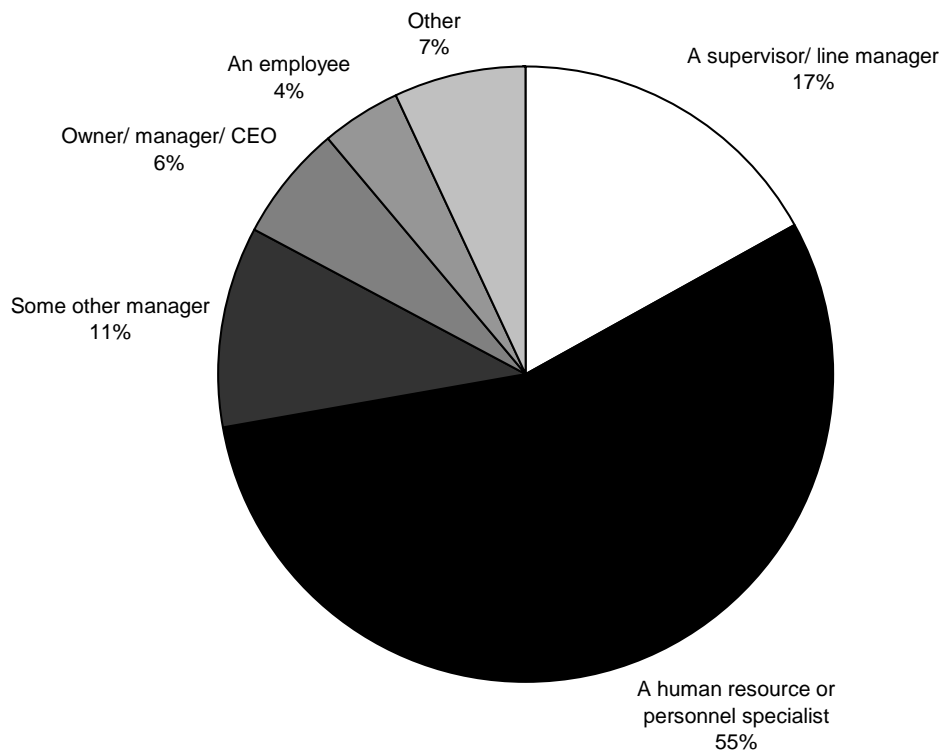
Table 2.4 Product type by Job Title

	Base	Conference	Getting it Right	In Depth Session	Key Point Session
A supervisor/ line manager	232	10.7%	26.0%	21.9%	10.7%
A human resource personnel or personnel specialist	750	45.3%	45.1%	58.2%	62.6%
Some other manager	146	8.0%	10.4%	10.3%	11.4%
Owner/ manager/ CEO	81	6.7%	9.3%	3.4%	4.1%
An employee	56	2.7%	3.5%		5.6%
A full-time trade union officer	10	5.3%	.7%		.4%
A trade union lay representative	11	1.3%	.7%	2.7%	.4%
An employee representative	9	1.3%			1.2%
A lawyer/ solicitor	8	5.3%	.2%	1.4%	.1%
Payroll officer/ Administrator	14		.9%		1.5%
Health practitioner	6		.4%		.6%
A CAB/ volunteer adviser	9	10.7%	.2%		
Other	26	2.7%	2.6%	2.1%	1.3%
Total	1358	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source Ecorys Survey: Base = 1358

Larger organisations (those with 250+ employees) were more likely to send human resource professionals to the training events, whereas small and medium sized organisations were more likely to be represented by their owners, line managers, other managers or employees. Over 70 per cent of the delegates from larger organisations were Human Resource personnel/personnel specialists compared to just over a quarter (28 per cent) from small organisations (less than 50) and 60 per cent from medium size organisations (50-249). This is to be expected, as smaller organisations are less likely to have human resource specialists hence employment relations issues are likely to come under the remit of general managers.

Figure 2.3 Proportion of delegates attending the training



Source: Ecorys survey, Base n=1,361

2.3 Satisfaction with training

2.3.1 Satisfaction by product type

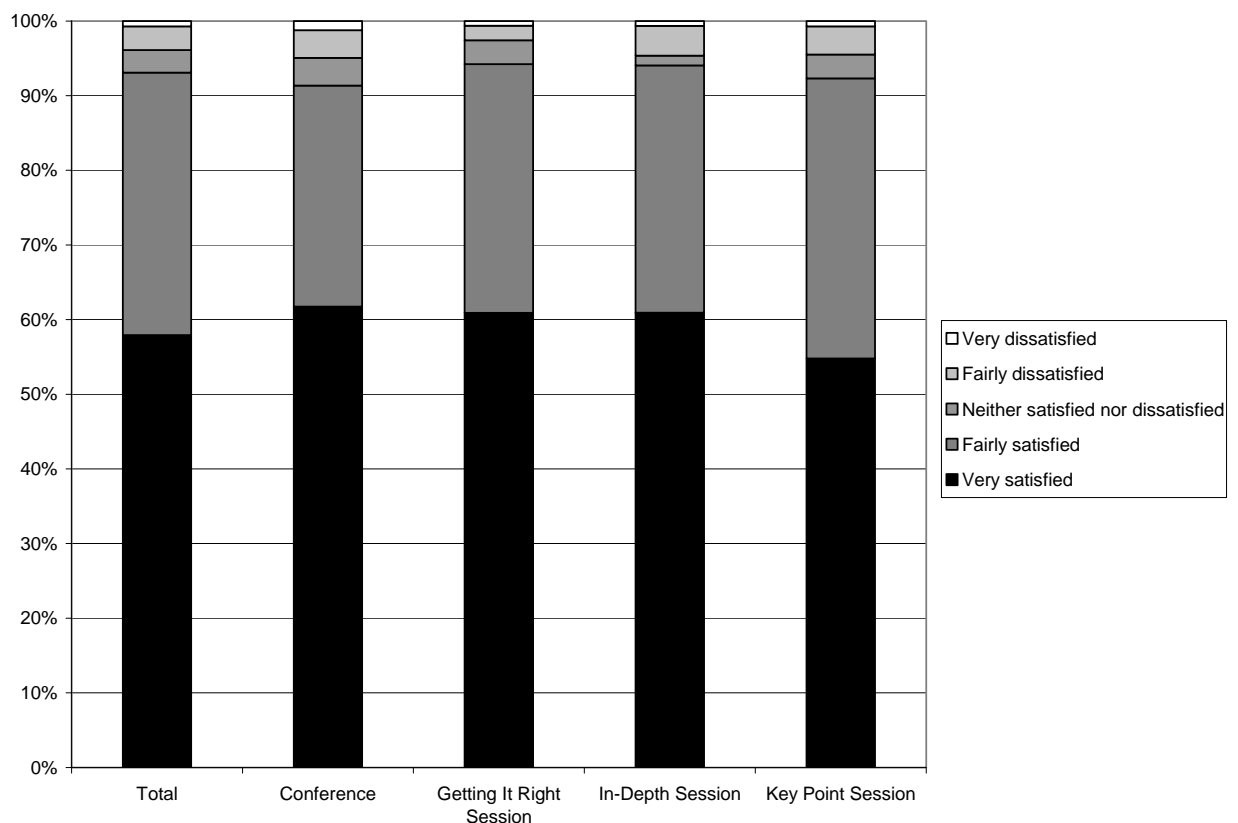
The Acas 2010 survey explored the extent to which delegates were satisfied with the Open Access training. The survey evidence suggests that satisfaction remains high in line with the 2005/06 evaluation⁵. The vast majority were satisfied with the training and this was the case for delegates across all organisation types. As highlighted in Fig 2.4, over 90 per cent of all delegates were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the training delivered via different product types (Key Point Sessions (92 per cent), Conferences (91 per cent), In-Depth sessions (94 per cent) and Getting it Right sessions (94 per cent)). Over half (58 per cent) were very satisfied with the training, while a further 35 per cent were fairly satisfied. Less than 4 per cent of the delegates were dissatisfied with the training (i.e. fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

⁵ <http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=742&p=0> (Research Paper: Acas training services, 2005-6 National evaluation)

The satisfaction ratings for the 2006 evaluation were slightly higher, 97 per cent of delegates either satisfied or very satisfied with the training, however, as per this 2010 survey, 58 per cent of these reported that they were very satisfied with the training. The reason for this marginally lower overall satisfaction in 2011 is likely to be that the satisfaction question wording has changes ('satisfied' changed to 'fairly satisfied') and could also be due to different subjects being popular at 2006 compared to 2011, as satisfaction does vary by training topic (Figure 2.6).

These figures are slightly less positive than satisfaction levels shown in the feedback survey which delegates are asked to complete immediately at the end of each Open Access training event (using the same period of 1 March to 31 August 2010), where the proportions stating they are very satisfied (72 per cent) is higher and those stating they are fairly satisfied lower (25 per cent). This shift towards the less positive response when asked longer after the survey could be due to delegates having more time to reflect on the training, a greater sense of anonymity when not completing the form in the same room as the trainer who collects the forms or unknown effects such as influences from previous questions on the questionnaire.

Figure 2.4 Satisfaction with training by product type



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,388

The marginal differences across satisfaction ratings in relation to the different product types for the 2010 survey are consistent with internal knowledge within Acas that suggests that Key Point sessions on the whole do tend to generate slightly lower satisfaction ratings compared to other Acas training sessions. Further analysis to explore why this may be the case suggests that delegates who had attended Key Point sessions were as likely to be 'satisfied' using the broad definition but just over half (55 per cent) of the delegates who attended Key Point sessions reported that they were 'very satisfied' with the training compared to an average of 60 per cent across all the other sessions. The shortfall in those 'very satisfied' was made up for in the proportion who were 'fairly satisfied' with the training: a higher proportion (37 per cent) indicated that they were 'fairly satisfied' with Key Points compared to 33 per cent for each of the In Depth and Getting it Right sessions and 30 per cent for Conferences.

Moving on to look at those delegates in the 2010 survey who were not satisfied with the training they had received, the survey asked these respondents to explain the reasons for their dissatisfaction. Delegates commonly explained their lack of satisfaction as being because they felt the training had either been very basic or too generic, and as a result they had learnt nothing new.

The survey also explored the extent to which delegates who had attended the training were likely to recommend it to others in their organisation. The evidence highlights that the majority were likely to recommend the training to their colleagues and this was the case across all product type as per the previous evaluation, though the proportion was higher (97 per cent) in the previous evaluation. Overall, 85 per cent reported that they were very likely or quite likely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager. Just over half of all delegates (53 per cent) said they were very likely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager while a further third (32 per cent) said they were quite likely to do so. Approximately 6 per cent reported that were quite or very unlikely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager and many of the reasons provided for these responses were similar to those given by respondents who had indicated that they were dissatisfied with the training (Fig 2.5). However, other delegates reported that they did not feel it was necessary for other colleagues in their organisation to attend the training as they planned to deliver a similar training in house. Comments included:

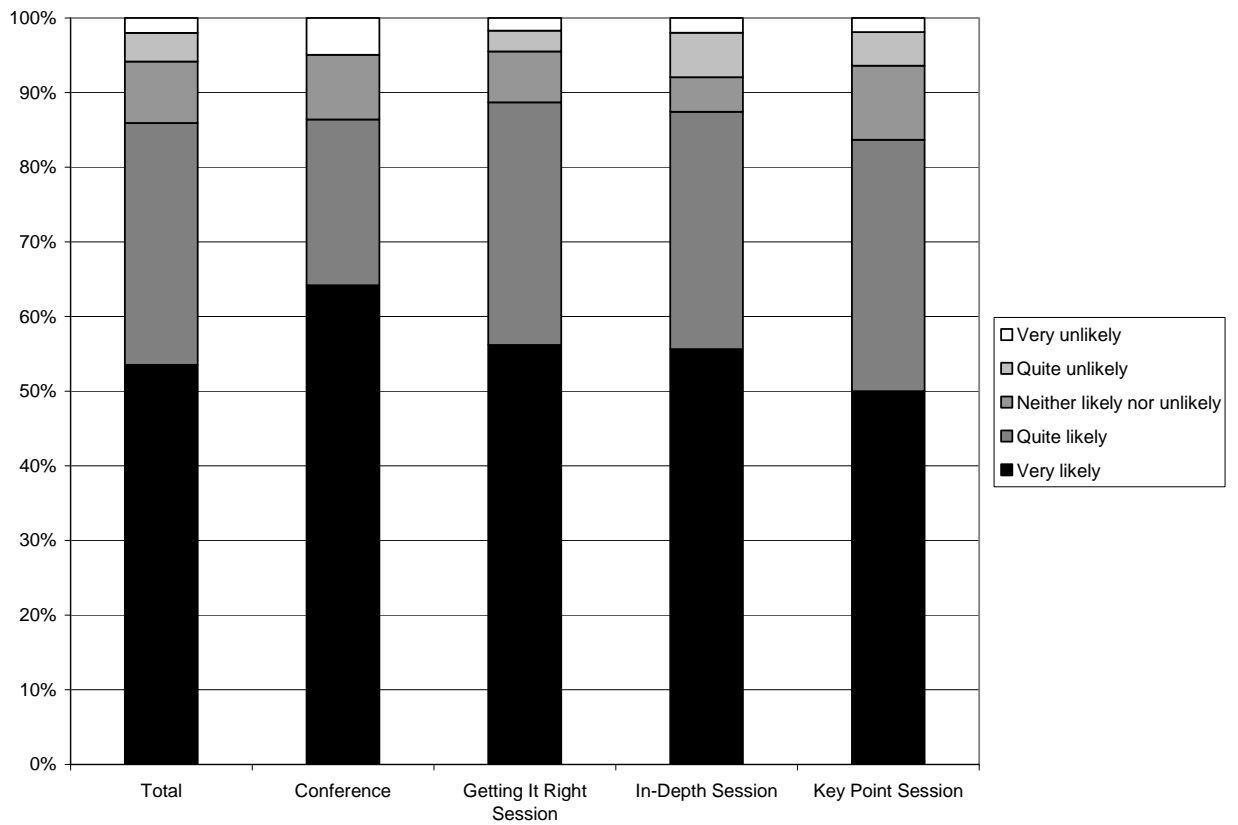
"As the fit notes are now in use, [further] training would not be relevant."

"I am the only person dealing with this area in our company."

"We would deliver something in house."

"More cost-effective to just download a booklet as this covered the content of the course."

Figure 2.5 Percentage of delegates likely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager by product type

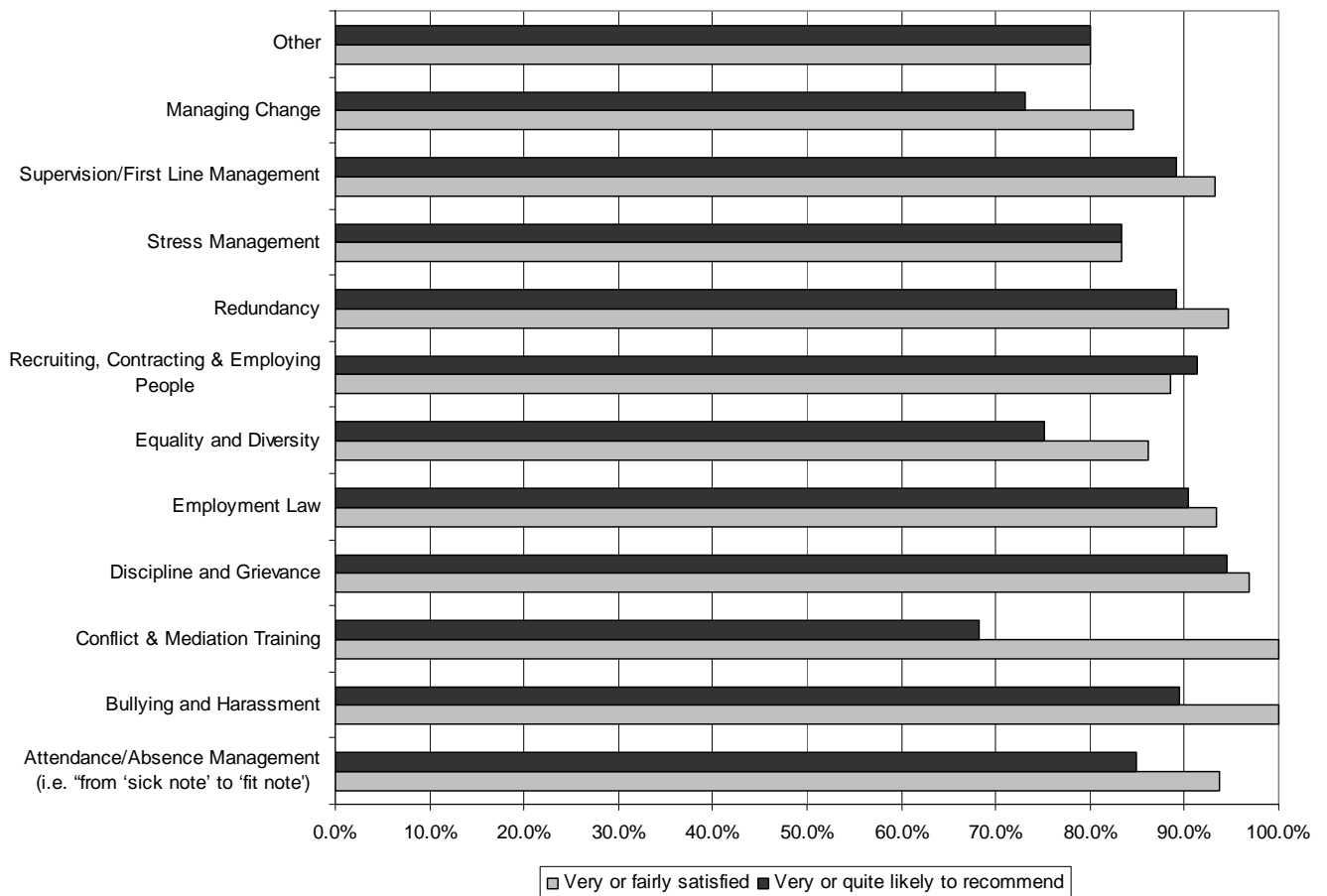


Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,386

2.3.2 Recommendations and satisfaction by training event topic

Figure 2.6 compares the proportion of delegates reporting that they were very or fairly satisfied with the training with those who were very or quite likely to recommend the training to a colleague or manager to explore similarities between the two. The figure highlights that all the delegates who attended the Bullying and Harassment and Conflict and Mediation training were satisfied with these events, however, the proportion that would recommend the training for both training events were slightly lower compared to other events and the lowest for those who attended the Conflict and Mediation training. However, due to small sample sizes within a number of these event types these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 2.6 Recommendations and satisfaction with training by training event topic

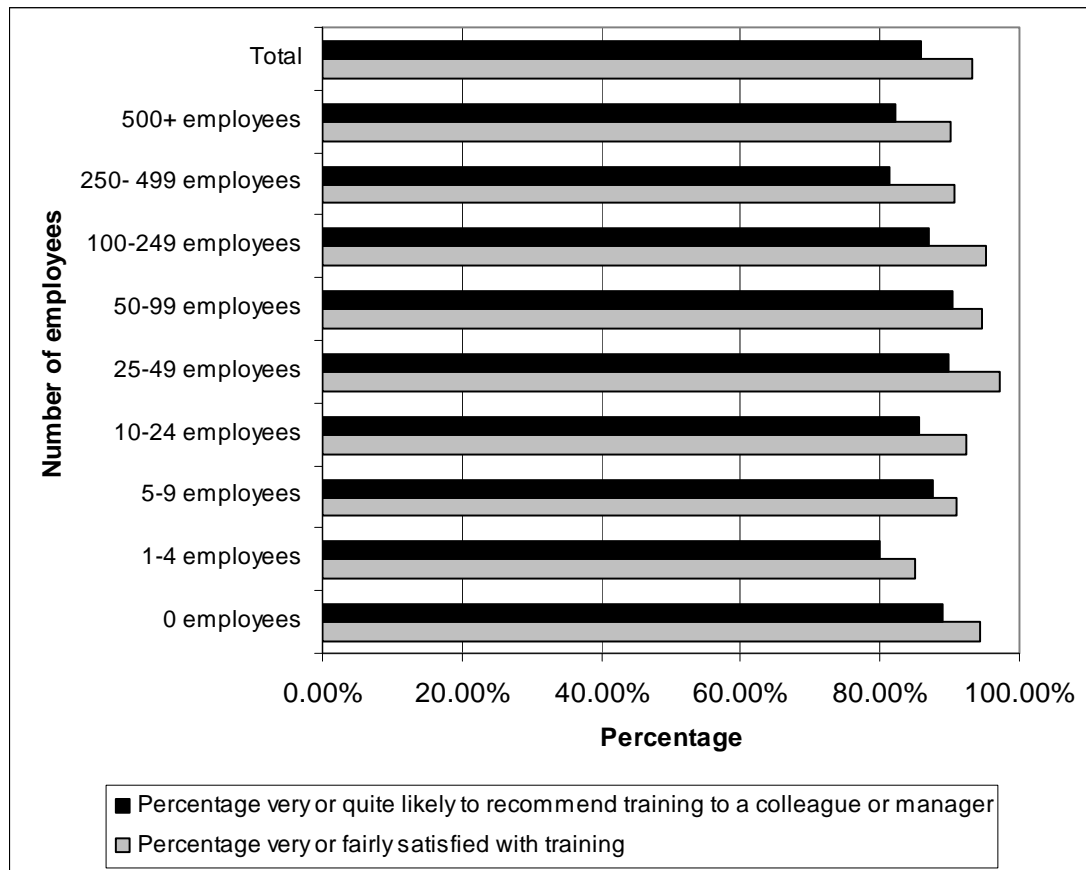


Source: Ecorys survey, Based on only valid responses

2.3.3 Satisfaction by organisation size

With regards to satisfaction in terms of organisation size, satisfaction levels were high (over 90 per cent) across the board with minor variations (0.6 per cent to 9 per cent). Delegates from larger organisations were likely to provide a slightly lower rating and less likely to recommend the training, while medium sized organisations, employing between 25 and 100 people, tended to have the highest rates of satisfaction and were more likely to recommend the training to others in the organisation (Fig 2.7).

Figure 2.7 Satisfaction with training by organisation size

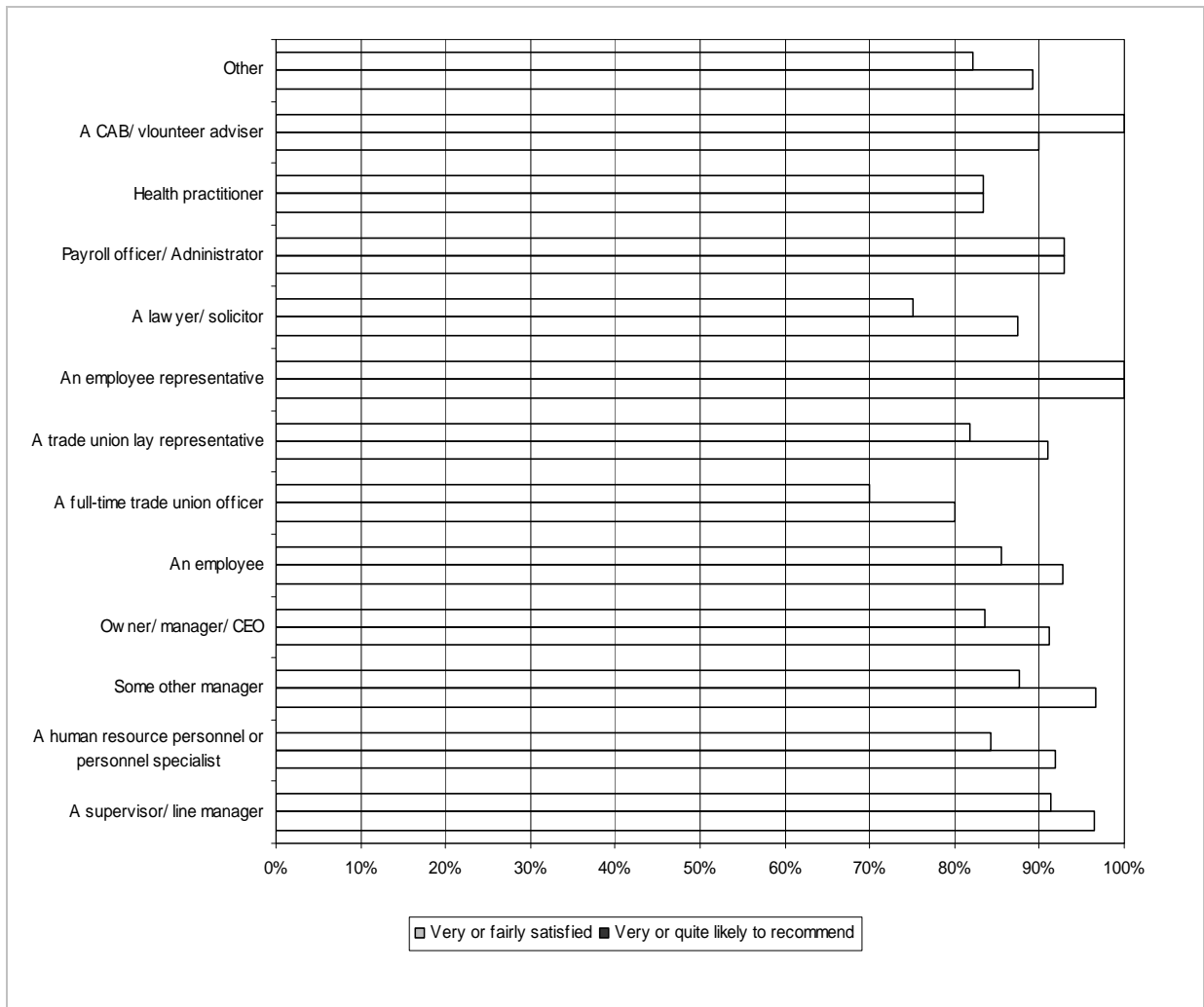


Source: Ecorys Survey, Base numbers based on only valid responses

2.3.4 Satisfaction by delegate type

In line with the general trend, satisfaction levels were generally high despite the job role of the delegate who attended the training. The highest ratings (over 95 per cent) were from supervisors/line managers and other managers and the lowest from trade union officers, this group was also less likely to recommend the training to other colleagues.

Figure 2.8 Satisfaction by delegate



3.0 OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF THE TRAINING

Summary

- Delegates attended the training mainly to improve their knowledge of a particular subject area. The majority (81 per cent) gave this option as one of the main reasons.
- According to the survey, the vast majority (92 per cent) of delegates returned to their workplace with a good understanding of the subjects addressed by the course.
- Most delegates (76 per cent) reported that they had made some kind of change to the policies and practices of their organisation or plan to do so following on from the training. Delegates were more likely to have reviewed existing policies than to have revised policies or introduced new policies.
- Delegates involved in training on Absence or Attendance management such as 'fit note' training events were more likely than average to have reviewed or revised existing policies (57 per cent or above) but less likely to have introduced new policies (20 per cent).
- In line with the most popular types of training delivered in the survey time period, delegates were more likely to have improved policies relating to Absence and Attendance management, followed by Discipline and Grievance.
- Where changes had been made to policies and procedures, a significant proportion (80 per cent) had reported an impact on the organisation. Overall, the largest impact was on internal communication, approximately a third (30 per cent) felt the changes made had improved communication within their organisation.
- Overall the survey evidence suggests most of the delegates (76 per cent) would not have accessed similar training elsewhere.

This section discusses the extent to which the Open Access training has influenced delegates to make changes in their HR policies, and the impact of these changes on their respective organisations. It reports on the reasons given by delegates for attending the training, the extent to which the training improved the knowledge and skills of delegates, whether the training has led to changes being made to policies and procedures and the impact of the training on their respective organisations.

3.1 Objectives of the Open Access training

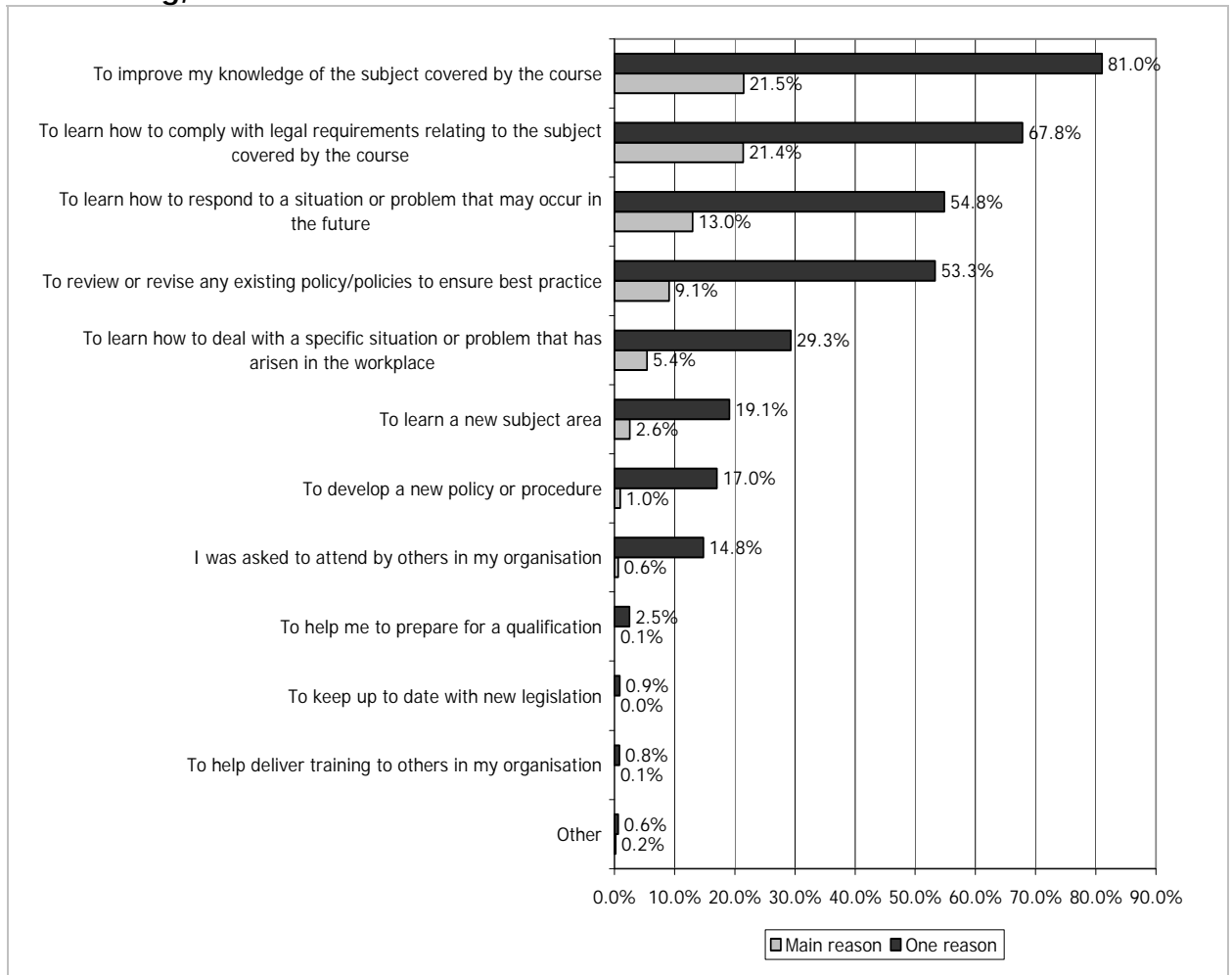
The survey aimed to explore delegates' reasons for attending events delivered under the Open Access training, and the extent to which reasons varied by event type or product type. This section presents the key findings under this area.

3.1.1 Reasons for attending training

Reasons cited by delegates for attending the training varied according to the survey evidence, however Fig 3.1 highlights that the top 4 reasons cited by a significant proportion of the delegates were as follows:

- To improve knowledge of the subject covered by the course (81 per cent gave this option as one of their reasons, with 21 per cent citing it as their main reason)
- To learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subject area (68 per cent overall, with 21 per cent as their main reason)
- To learn how to respond to a situation or problem that may occur in the future (55 per cent overall, with 13 per cent as their main reason)
- To review or revise any existing policy / policies to ensure best practice (53 per cent overall, with 9 per cent as their main reason)

Figure 3.1 Percentage of delegates giving different reasons for attending the training, and their main reason



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n = 1,388

Specific reasons provided by representatives from organisations who were involved in the case study research presented in more detail in section 3.3.5 of this report included developing knowledge around subject areas such as Employment Law to help them resolve situations and problems that could potentially arise in the workplace and improving knowledge of other policies such as Attendance/Absence Management procedures. Other comments provided were as follows:

"... learn a bit more about how Acas recommended we do investigations for disciplinary and grievances and other staff related issues and then utilise that to develop their own in house investigation training.."

".... we were trying to ensure that what we did followed private sector,... we had to have our own policies in place so that's where Acas was very supportive and helpful to us."

"You hear about an increase in cases, and we [in this country] appear to be heading for more tribunals. We want to avoid that and thought it would be good for us to go on a course."

3.1.2 Reasons by event type

The reasons for attending the training varied slightly according to the event type attended by the delegates, however the main reason given by delegates across all event types was with respect to improving their knowledge of the subject covered by the course. Just over 80 per cent of the delegates who attended the training cited this as the main reason for being involved in the Open Access training (Table 3.1).

Comparing the five most attended events with the five top reasons cited by delegates highlights that:

- Learning how to comply with legal requirements was the second most reported reason after improving subject knowledge for delegates who had attended Attendance / Absence Management (71 per cent), Employment Law (66 per cent) and Equality & Diversity training (71 per cent)
- Learning how to respond to a situation that might occur in the future was the second most reported reason for delegates who were involved in the Discipline & Grievance training (77 per cent) and the joint top response for delegates of Supervision / First Line Management training (70 per cent)

A full table of the reasons cited by the delegates by event type has been provided in the Annex (Table A3)

Table 3.1 Reasons for attending the training by event (Table highlights the most attended events and the top five main reasons only)

Reason	Attendance / Absence Management	Discipline and Grievance	Employment Law	Equality and Diversity	Supervision / First Line Management
To learn how to deal with a specific situation or problem that has arisen in the workplace	27.5%	45.5%	42.0%	18.7%	52.7%
To learn how to respond to a situation or problem that may occur in the future	59.7%	77.3%	63.0%	38.0%	70.3%
To improve my knowledge of the subject covered by the course	81.2%	81.8%	83.3%	82.5%	70.3%
To learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subject covered by the course	71.3%	27.3%	66.0%	71.1%	39.2%
To review or revise any existing policy/policies to ensure best practice	58.3%	31.8%	46.3%	57.2%	16.2%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n = 1,388

3.1.3 Outcomes of training

The 2010 survey assessed the outcomes of the training in relation to raising the awareness and understanding of delegates' knowledge in various areas, including the extent to which the training had:

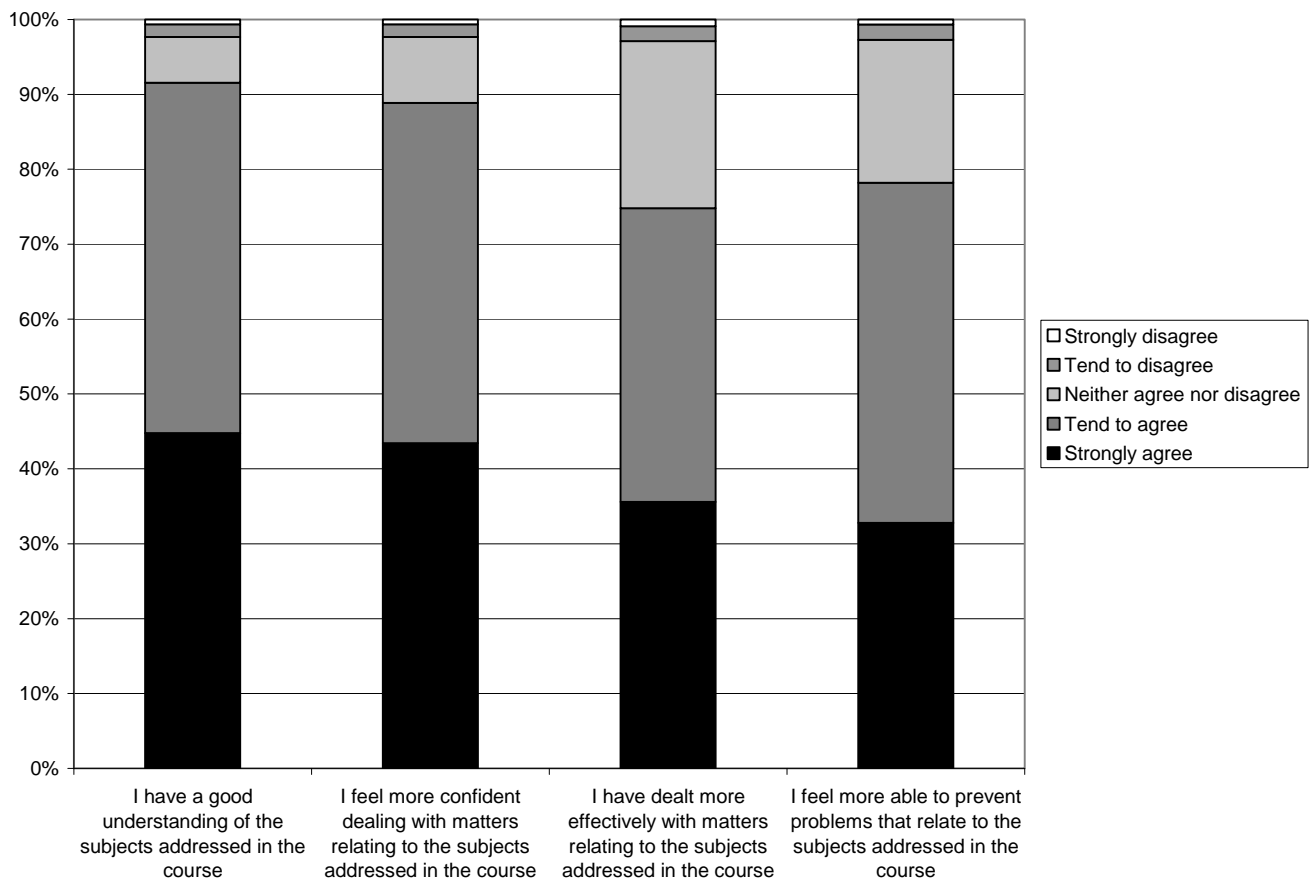
- Developed their understanding of the subjects addressed in the course
- Made them feel more confident in dealing with matters relating to the subjects addressed in the course
- Enabled them to deal more effectively with the matters relating to the subjects addressed in the course
- Made them feel more able to prevent problems that relate to the subjects addressed in the course

The survey evidence suggests that the training outcomes in all of the above were high across the board and in the case of all sub-categories (i.e. across all product types and organisation sizes). As outlined under Fig 3.2:

- More than nine out of ten delegates (92 per cent) agreed that they had achieved a good understanding of the subject area addressed at the training they attended (either tend to agree or strongly agree with the statement)
- A similar proportion (89 per cent) felt more confident in dealing with matters relating to the course topic
- About three quarters (75 per cent) had actually been able to deal more effectively with matters relating to the subjects addressed in the course
- Just over three quarters (78 per cent) felt more able to prevent problems relating to the subjects addressed in the course

A detailed breakdown of the outcomes of the training is presented in Table A5 in the Annex.

Figure 3.2 Achievement of outcomes - Percentage of participants agreeing with each statement



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n = 1,374, disregards respondents those who did not answer the question

Interviews with representatives from organisations involved in the case study work also highlight the value that some delegates placed on the training. For example, those involved in the training felt they were now 'better informed' and therefore more able to deal effectively with employment issues that could potentially arise in their organisation, others felt they had a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training and as a result are more confident in dealing with matters linked to the training.

3.2 Impact of the training on delegates' respective organisations

3.2.1 Changes made in organisational policies and practices as a result of the training

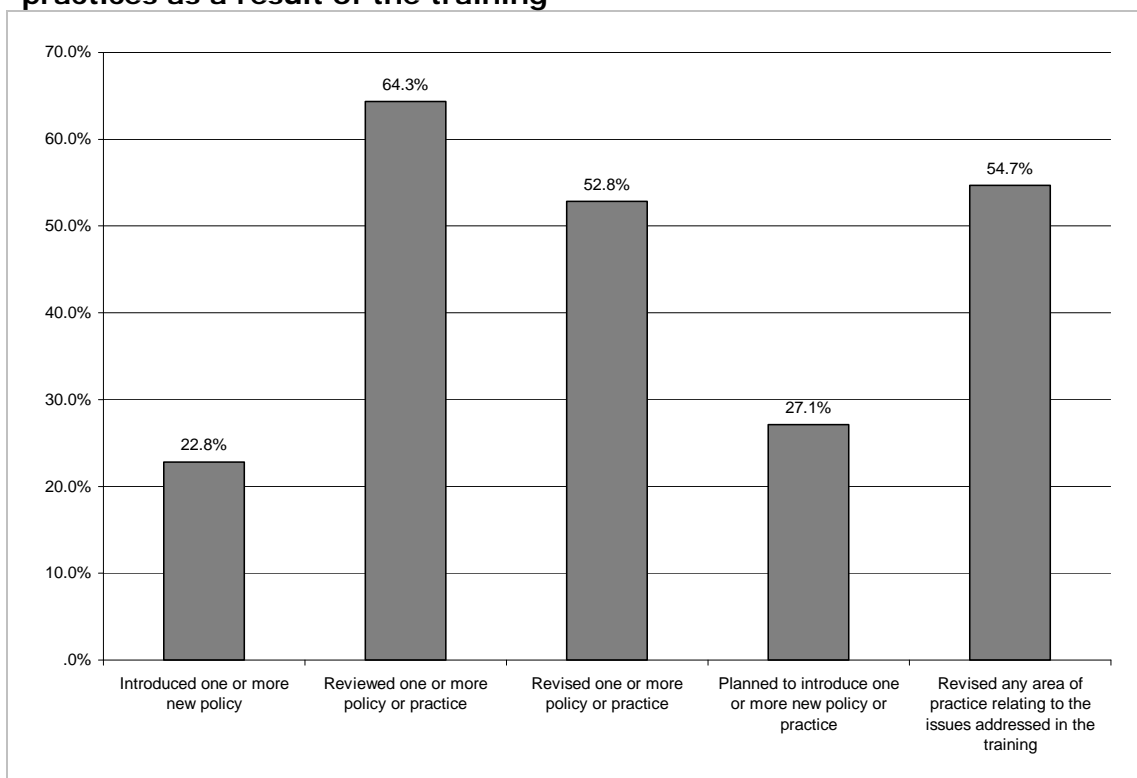
The 2010 survey also explored the extent to which delegates who had participated in the Open Access training had made changes or planned to make changes to their HR policies or practices. Overall, a significant proportion (76 per cent) of the delegates who had been involved in the Open Access training reported that they had had reviewed, revised or introduced one or more new

policies and practices in their respective organisations or planned to introduce one or more new policy or practice as a result of the training (Fig 3.3):

- Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of the delegates reported that they had reviewed one or more policy or practice since attending the training
- Over half (53 per cent) indicated that they had revised one or more policy or practice
- Just under a quarter (23 per cent) reported that they had introduced one or more new policy or practice and over a quarter (27 per cent) planned to do so.

The evidence from the 2005/06 evaluation suggests at first glance that the impact in relation to changes made by delegates was lower in this current round compared to the previous evaluation of the services. In the 2005/06 evaluation, 88 per cent indicated that they had made changes to their HR policies and practices. With regards to where these changes had been made, 79 per cent reported that they had reviewed one or more policy or procedure since attending the training, 52 per cent indicated that they had revised one or more policy or procedure and 35 per cent indicated that they had introduced one or new more policy or procedure. However, it is hard to say whether the lower figures over time are real differences, as the wording used for this question has changed since 2006, and if this difference is real, it may be due to the different mix of training topics and training types in demand at the time of the respective surveys.

Figure 3.3 Percentage of delegates who had either made changes or planned to make changes to their organisation's HR policies and practices as a result of the training



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n =1281, disregards respondents who did not answer the question

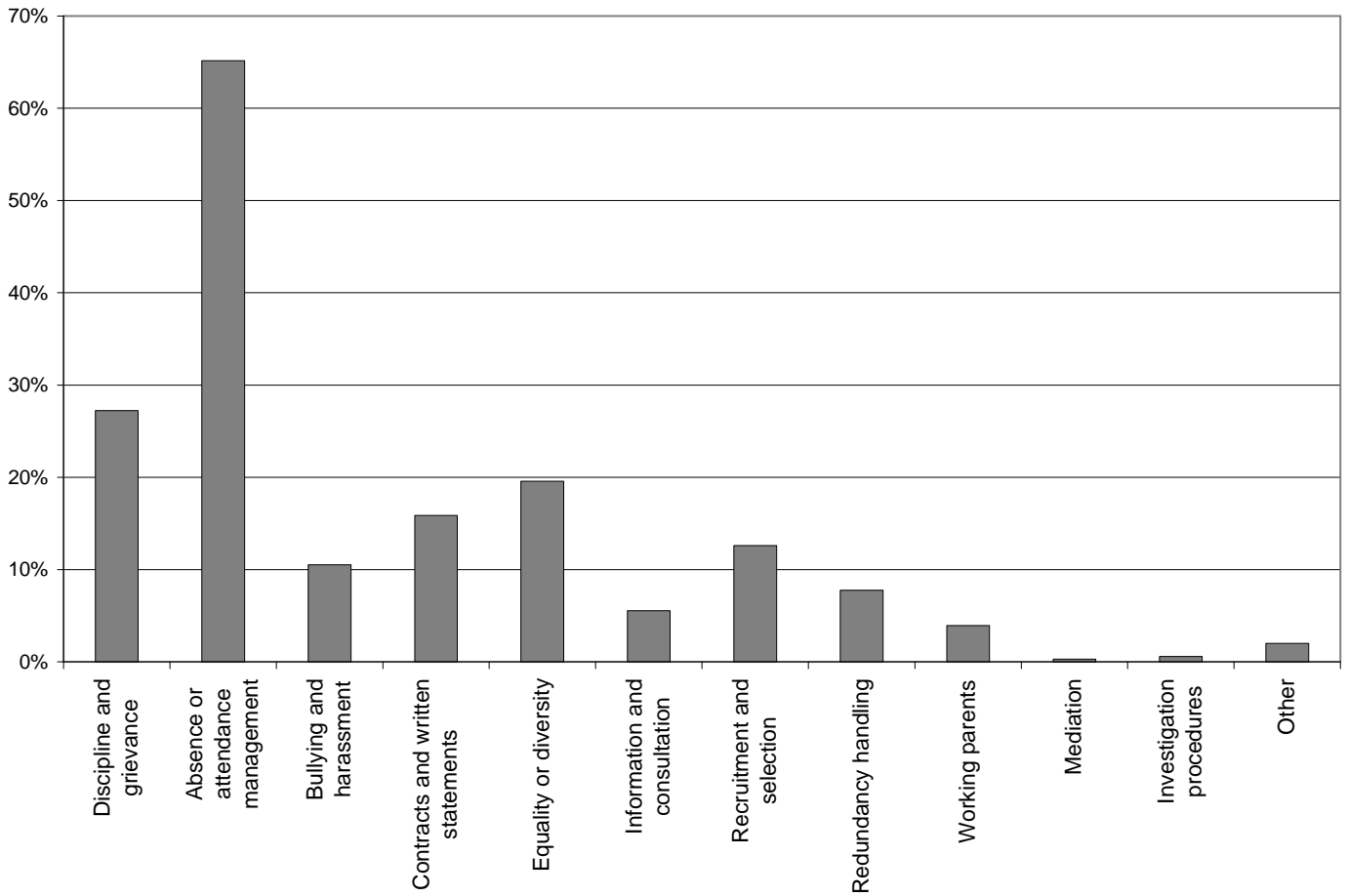
Most of the changes that delegates made or planned to make were in relation to organisations' Absence and Attendance management policies and practices. Approximately two thirds (65 per cent) of the delegates had made changes in this area. Discipline and Grievance policies was the second most common area in which delegates had made changes, just over a quarter (27 per cent) reported making changes in this area (Fig 3.4). This could be due to legislation changes which came into effect in March 2010 in relation to the new 'Statement of Fitness for Work' or 'fit note' which replaced the old 'sick note' as well as the 2009 dispute resolution changes to Acas's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, which can be summarised as follows: .

Stemming from the Gibbons Review, BIS requested that Acas review its Code of practice in the light of the removal of the statutory three-step procedures, and Acas formally launched a public consultation on the revised Code in May 2008. Following the consultation, from April 2009, Acas introduced a new short, non-prescriptive, principles-based statutory Code accompanied by comprehensive non-statutory guidance. The Code allows tribunals to consider the appropriateness of parties' behaviour relevant to the circumstances of a particular case, bearing in mind what would be appropriate for the size and resource of the employer and the nature and severity of the complaint. The changes made to the Code of Practice were reflected in associated handbooks and booklets and the Acas website and training products were reviewed to reflect the changes. Acas introduced a series of its 'Open Access' discipline and grievance training that to varying extents focussed on the Acas Code of practice:

- Managing Discipline and Grievance (Getting It Right),
- Discipline and Grievance - A new approach (Key Point and Getting It Right)
- Discipline and Grievance (Gibbons) Educating Employers (Key Point)

As is the case with Acas training in general, small and medium workplaces were more likely to be represented at Code-related training sessions than larger workplaces.

Figure 3.4 Type of policy, procedure or practices that delegates had changed or planned to change as a percentage of all delegates that made some changes or planned to do so



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,022

Interviews with organisations involved in the follow on case study work also highlight how the training attended has led to a number of changes in the HR policies and practices of these organisations. Changes made by some of these organisations as a result of the training include developing a management toolkit to support investigation officers in their role, recruiting additional staff such as welfare officers and HR personnel to support the implementation of policies and practices, raising staff's awareness of HR policies and requirements and introducing new processes such as return to work interviews and absence procedures.

Generally and across the board delegates were more likely to report that they had reviewed one or more policy or practice (see Table A6 in the Annex). However, there were minor differences in some cases. For example, on average delegates from small organisations (1-49) were more likely to report that they had introduced one or more new policy compared to those with 50+ employees, perhaps reflecting the fact that they are likely to have fewer written policies in the first place compared to other organisations.

3.2.2 Changes made by event type attended by delegates

Further analysis to explore the extent to which different training events had influenced delegates to make changes around the subject areas linked to these events highlights that:

- Among the major topic areas (where the sample size was greater than 50), delegates of Equality and Diversity training were the most likely to report that they had either made changes or planned to make changes under each of the options provided in the survey
- Delegates attending Supervision / First Line Management training were the least likely to have reviewed, made changes to or planned to make changes to policies or procedures, compared to those attending events covering the other major topic areas
- Participants of Attendance / Absence Management training were more likely than average to have reviewed or revised policies but less likely than average to have introduced or made plans to introduce new policies

With respect to the area of policy changed, the following table shows the most common response by event type (Table 3.2)

Table 3.2 Percentage of delegates making changes to their organisation as a result of attending the training, by event

	Base	Introduced one or more new policy	Reviewed one or more policy or practice	Revised one or more policy or practice	Planned to introduce one or more new policy or practice	Revised any area of practice relating to the issues addressed in the training
Total	1,393	22.8%	64.3%	52.8%	27.1%	54.7%
Main topic:						
Attendance / Absence Management	717	20.7%	70.3%	57.3%	20.6%	59.1%
Bullying and Harassment	19	22.2%	38.9%	29.4%	36.8%	33.3%
Conflict & Mediation Training	22	14.3%	28.6%	36.4%	33.3%	45.5%
Discipline and Grievance	162	22.9%	56.3%	44.3%	30.6%	52.1%
Employment Law	166	29.1%	67.1%	59.5%	30.9%	52.1%
Equality and Diversity	109	32.3%	72.7%	65.3%	44.3%	61.3%
Recruiting, Contracting & Employing People	35	31.4%	56.3%	50.0%	45.2%	54.5%
Redundancy	37	21.9%	63.6%	45.2%	29.0%	56.3%
Stress Management	6	33.3%	50.0%	50.0%	25.0%	60.0%
Supervision / First Line Management	74	9.4%	38.8%	23.4%	25.0%	33.8%
Managing Change	26	34.8%	50.0%	36.4%	36.4%	31.8%
Other	20	17.6%	42.1%	33.3%	38.9%	45.0%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,393

Note: column percentages are based on valid responses and disregards respondents who did not answer the question

The survey evidence highlights that the subject of the training is a good indicator of the type of change made by delegates. For example, all the delegates who attended the Bullying and Harassment event reported that they had either made changes or planned to make changes to their policies in this area. Similarly, the majority (94 per cent) of those who attended the Attendance / Absence Management training had subsequently either made changes or planned to make changes to their Attendance or Absence management policies (Table 3.3)

Table 3.3 Most common area of policy reviewed, revised or introduced, by main topic area

Main topic	Most common type of policy changed	Percentage of delegates ⁶
Attendance / Absence Management	Absence or attendance management	94.0%
Bullying and Harassment	Bullying and harassment	100.0%
Conflict & Mediation Training	Discipline and grievance	57.1%
Discipline and Grievance	Discipline and grievance	93.6%
Employment Law	Absence or attendance management	44.3%
Equality and Diversity	Equality or diversity	85.4%
Recruiting, Contracting & Employing People	Contracts and written statements	75.0%
Redundancy	Redundancy handling	84.4%
Stress Management	Other	50.0%
Supervision / First Line Management	Absence or attendance management	48.6%
Managing Change	Other	37.5%
Other	Discipline and grievance	45.5%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,047, disregards respondents not answering the question

3.2.3 Changes by Product type

The survey findings also highlight that across different product types delegates who had been on Key Point Sessions were more likely to report that they had reviewed or revised one or more policy or practice. The findings also suggest that those who had been on Conferences were less likely to report that they had introduced one or more new policy, only 16 per cent of the delegates who had been on a Conference reported that they had introduced one or more new policy compared to approximately a quarter for all the other product types. This is not surprising bearing in mind that this product type is the least intensive session out of the four.

⁶ Base includes only participants that made some change to the organisation as a result of the training

Table 3.4 Changes made by product type

	Total	Conference	Getting It Right Session	In-Depth Session	Key Point Session
Introduced one or more new policy	22.8%	15.9%	26.3%	22.3%	21.1%
Reviewed one or more policy or practice	64.3%	51.4%	60.0%	49.6%	71.8%
Revised one or more policy or practice	52.8%	40.0%	49.4%	43.0%	58.9%
Planned to introduce one or more new policy or practice	27.1%	26.9%	31.0%	35.2%	22.3%
Revised any area of practice relating to the issues addressed in the training	54.7%	42.9%	51.0%	50.8%	59.6%
Total	1393	81	469	151	692

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1,393

Note: column percentages are bases on valid responses and disregards respondents who did not answer the question

3.3 Longer term impacts

To explore the longer term impact of the Open Access training, delegates who reported making changes to their policies and practices (i.e. reviewed, revised or introduced one or more policies or procedures) as a result of the training were asked to consider the extent to which these changes have impacted on the following areas in their respective organisations:

- Staff morale and motivation
- Employment Tribunal cases
- Staff retention
- Staff absenteeism
- Relations between management and employees
- Communication within the organisation
- Recruitment and selection
- Leadership and management skills of managers

This section discusses the extent to which delegates felt the training had impacted on the areas outlined above.

3.3.1 Overall impact of the training

The survey findings highlight that for a significant proportion of delegates, the training has led to positive changes in their organisations. The majority (80 per cent) of the delegates reported that the training had impacted in at least one of the areas listed in Fig 3.5. The four key areas that delegates reported impact under as a result of the changes instigated in their organisations were as follows:

- **Communication within the organisation** – approximately a third (30 per cent) felt the changes made had improved communication within their organisation
- **Relations between management and employees** – over a quarter (26 per cent) reported an improvement in the relations between management and employees
- **Leadership and management skills of managers** – just under a quarter (24 per cent) felt the changes had improved the leadership and management skills of line managers in their organisations
- **Staff Absenteeism** - 24 per cent felt the changes made had reduced staff absenteeism in their organisations.

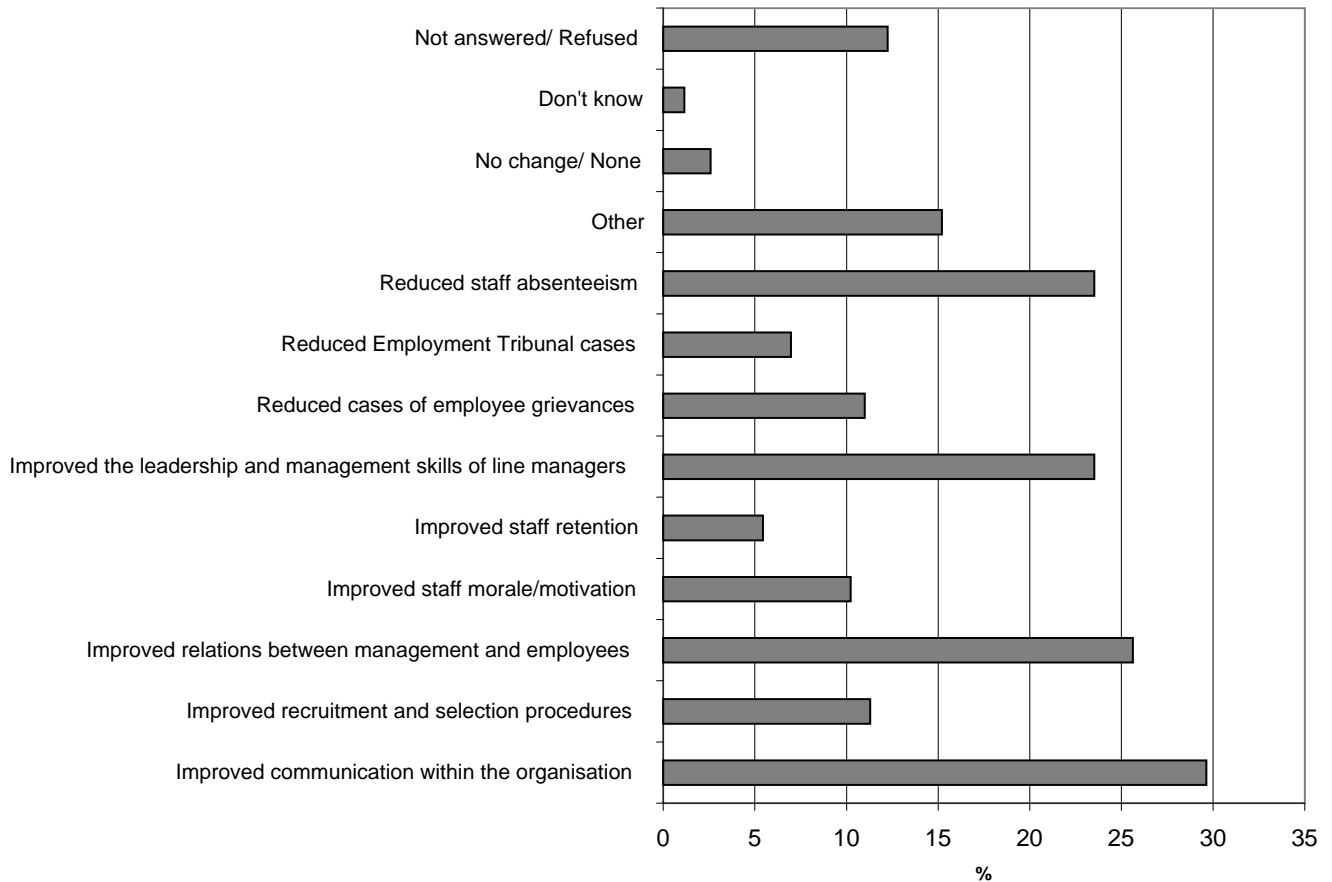
Specific comments in relation to the longer term impact of the training cited by organisations involved in the case study follow up interviews also illustrate the impact of the training. For example, the management team of one organisation felt that the training had made them more confident and proactive in providing advice around potential discipline and grievances issues. This they felt had resulted in less cases being pursued formally and therefore a reduction in costly investigations.

"From a management perspective looking at resolutions, even in the case of disciplinaries, at an informal level if at all possible, rather than escalating them immediately into a formal issue ... What we've seen is a significant reduction in the number of disciplinaries relating to misconduct and from grievances relating to employment relationships or the manager/employee relationships."

"We haven't had many grievances, so from a workload point of view it's brilliant. Grievance investigations can be lengthy and can be complex. A reduction in formal grievances can only be a good thing. Things are being dealt with at an informal and localised level."

A summary of the responses are outlined in Figure 3.5 overleaf.

Figure 3.5 Impacts made on organisations as a percentage of delegates making changes to policies, practices and procedures



Source: Ecorys Survey, Base=1,047 – disregards respondents who did not answer the question

3.3.2 Overall impact by event type

Further analysis to explore the impact of the different training events on delegates' organisations perhaps unsurprisingly highlights the link between the training subject and the nature of organisational impact: delegates attending Attendance / Absence Management training were more likely than average to report that the training had impacted on the absenteeism rates of their staff - a third of all delegates who went on this training and had implemented changes reported an impact in this area. However, those who were involved in the Discipline & Grievance training tended to report a range of changes made as a result of the training that had resulted in a number of impacts, including improving relations between management and employees, improving communication within the organisation and improving leadership and management skills of line managers (Table 3.4). The figures in the Table below should however be interpreted with caution due to the small bases linked to a number of the subject areas.

Table 3.5 Impact on the organisation, as a percentage of delegates making changes to policies and procedures

	Base	Reduced staff absenteeism	Improved relations between management and employees	Improved communication within the organisation	Improved the leadership and management skills of line managers
Total	1,047	23.5%	25.8%	29.8%	23.9%
Main topic:					
Attendance / Absence Management	571	33.6%	22.9%	25.9%	19.1%
Bullying and Harassment	14	0.0%*	35.7%*	35.7%*	28.6%*
Conflict & Mediation Training	14	0.0%*	35.7%*	21.4%*	21.4%*
Discipline and Grievance	109	14.7%	33.9%	36.7%	45.0%
Employment Law	122	15.6%	32.8%	35.2%	21.3%
Equality and Diversity	89	4.5%	18.0%	27.0%	23.6%
Recruiting, Contracting & Employing People	28	10.7%*	25.0%*	32.1%*	21.4%*
Redundancy	32	3.1%*	6.3%*	25.0%*	15.6%*
Stress Management	4	0.0%*	0.0%*	25.0%*	50.0%*
Supervision / First Line Management	37	13.5%*	51.4%*	51.4%*	51.4%*
Managing Change	16	37.5%*	37.5%*	37.5%*	18.8%*
Other	11	0.0%*	18.2%*	54.5%*	27.3%*

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base=1,047, respondents not answering the question included in the base: * = used where base is less than 50

3.3.3 Overall impact by sample categories

The survey also explored the overall impact of the training based on the categories created for sampling purposes as follows:

- **Not Attended A/AM** - delegates who have not been on an Attendance/Absence management course
- **A/AM and other** – delegates who had been on an Attendance/Absence management course and another course
- **Only AM – Other non Fit** – delegates who had been on an Attendance/Absence management course other than 'fit notes'

- **Only AM – Only Fit note** – delegates who had been on only 'fit note' sessions which is part of the Attendance/Absence management training

Further analysis of the overall impact of the training based on these sub-categories again highlight the link between the nature of the organisational impact and the type of training that delegates attended as noted in Section 3.3.2. The findings highlight that those who had been on an Attendance/Absence management course were more likely than average to report that the changes made as a result of the training had led to a reduction in staff absenteeism, improved relations relation between management and improved communication within the organisation. Interestingly, the highest proportions (over 40 per cent) that reported impacts across these three areas were delegates who had attended an Attendance/Absence Management course other than 'fit notes'. These figures should however be interpreted with caution due to the small bases linked to a number of these areas (see Table A8 in the Appendix).

3.3.4 Availability and take-up of alternative sources of support

A key consideration in assessing the impact of the training is the extent to which delegates would have taken up a similar alternative source of support in the absence of the Open Access training provision. If delegates would have obtained similar support elsewhere, then it is likely that any such outcomes would have been achieved anyway. Overall, survey evidence suggests that most delegates would not have accessed similar training from an alternative source, and it is estimated that 76 per cent of users would not have taken up a similar service elsewhere.

3.3.5 Case studies

As part of the evaluation of the Open Access training, follow up interviews were carried out with five organisations to explore in more depth the type of changes made to their HR policies and practices as a result of the training, and the impact of these changes on their organisation. The organisations profiled are as follows:

- **Newcastle Futures** – a small not for profit organisation with between 20-49 staff
- **Anon Org** – a public sector SME operating in the transport sector
- **Cheswold Park Hospital** – a secure psychiatric hospital for men with about 300-350 staff
- **QDP services** – an independent supplier of questionnaire data processing services with approximately 30 staff
- **Colchester English Study Centre** – a private English language school with approximately 50 staff

Four out of the five organisations had no formal HR function, and therefore accessed the training to develop their knowledge on specific HR policies in order to revise or introduce new policies. These case studies illustrate how organisations have used the knowledge acquired at the training to influence their HR policies and practices. The changes cited by these organisations include:

- Developing a management toolkit to support investigation officers in their role
- Recruiting additional staff such as welfare officers and HR personnel to support the implementation of HR policies and practices in their respective organisations
- Revising current policies and practices
- Raising staff's awareness of HR policies and requirements
- Introducing new processes such as return to work interviews and absence procedures

These changes have impacted on the case study organisations in a number of ways such as:

- Reducing the number of formal grievances and investigations raised by staff in their organisation
- Reducing staff absenteeism
- Improving practices within the organisation such as the quality of investigations
- Improving relations between management and employees and staff morale

The organisations involved in the case study are profiled in more depth in the following section.

Table 3.6 Cheswold Park Hospital

Background to the Organisation
<p>Cheswold Park Hospital is a secure psychiatric hospital for men in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. The hospital was opened in 2006 and is run by Riverside Healthcare Limited. The hospital has between 300 and 350 staff including part time and bank staff.</p>
Participation in the Open Access training
<p>Cheswold Park Hospital's HR staff usually attend a number of Acas training courses each year to ensure they keep up to date with HR law. In relation to the period of interest to this study, two staff members attended an in depth session on Internal Investigation Skills on 21st and 22nd July 2010 and Equality Training on 21st October 2010. The staff attended these sessions because they wanted to improve their knowledge of the subject area, and learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subjects. In addition to this, they were keen in developing new policies and procedures around this area. In particular, with regards to the Investigation skills training, they wanted to support their investigating officers in conducting investigations and develop their knowledge around good practices around investigation procedures.</p> <p><i>"...so the idea was we would go and learn a bit more about how Acas recommended we do investigations for disciplinary and grievances and other staff related issues and then utilise that to develop their own in house investigation training.."</i></p> <p>Both of the training sessions covered legislation around the subject area and practical case study exercises. The staff felt the delivery style of the training sessions worked well. The fact that the training was delivered to a small, informal group meant that participants could explore issues in more depth, ask questions, and share experiences.</p> <p><i>"The format worked really well for us as there was a lot of opportunity to ask questions throughout."</i></p> <p>Another aspect that they also felt worked well was the tutor's approach which included sharing his experiences of being an investigator; this gave them a practical understanding of the issues being discussed.</p> <p><i>"I understood everything he said, his style was brilliant, all the exercises were great and he was also able to bring his own experiences of being an investigator."</i></p>
Outcomes of the training
<p>This training session has resulted in a number of outcomes. The HR members feel they have a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training, and, as a result are more confident in dealing with matters linked to the training. In addition to the skills and knowledge acquired by the HR team, the organisation has since developed an action plan around policies that need to be reviewed, and, following on from that, introduced a number of new policies and practices and revised existing ones.</p> <p>A key area that the hospital felt required an urgent review was their disciplinary</p>

and grievance policy linked to their current absence and bullying policies. In addition to the above, the hospital has also developed a management toolkit and appointed welfare officers to support the changes made in the organisation.

Developing a management toolkit

Based on the knowledge acquired at the training sessions, the HR team have developed a toolkit for investigating officers to help them understand the investigation process and their role. The toolkit includes details of an investigating officer's responsibilities, checklists for different stages of the process and a hardcopy of the policy. The plan, in the longer term, is to run in house training sessions to further support their investigating officers.

Appointing welfare officers

One key area that the training highlighted was that the investigation process could in some cases lead to stress for both the employee being investigated and the witnesses involved. In order to overcome this problem, the hospital has assigned an independent welfare officer who maintains regular communication with the staff involved in the investigation process.

Overall, the hospital believes they have learnt two key lessons; one around the importance of communicating with all staff involved in an investigation, and the other, on the importance of having independent welfare officers to support staff going through the process.

Impact of the training

The hospital's revised disciplinary and grievance policy has led to a number of key impacts which include:

- a reduction in the number of formal grievance investigations;
- fewer staff absenteeism; and
- improved relations between management and employees

Reduction in the number of formal grievance investigations

The HR members who attended the training feel they are more confident and proactive in providing advice on discipline and grievances issues to their managers. This includes encouraging managers to resolve issues before they become serious. In addition, they also believe that their staff feel more confident about raising these issues. HR believe this approach has resulted in more issues being brought forward, however this has inevitably resulted in a reduction in formal investigations.

"The fact that we have more people coming forward and raising issues, informally, is a good reflection of the fact that they now feel that they can say something to somebody. I think before there have always been issues but I'm not sure if anyone would've been confident that they would have been dealt with properly."

Fewer staff absenteeism

The hospital feels the emphasis on ongoing communication, during the investigation process, and the creation of a new independent welfare officer role, has helped reduce the number of absences taken due to stress associated with the investigations.

Improved quality of investigations

Prior to the training, investigating officers had a limited understanding of how to conduct an investigation. The introduction of the new toolkit is said to have increased their officers understanding of their role, and the different stages of the process around investigation procedures. This in turn has led to a reduction in the errors made around this area.

"The policies are there and we ask people to read them but they don't necessarily read them... but because it's in here [the toolkit] it makes them read them and follow it as well so we don't have as many mistakes that happen."

Improved relations between management and employees

As a result of an improvement in staff's understanding of the grievance and disciplinary investigation processes, the organisation feels their hospital staff have become more supportive and sympathetic to those who are involved in investigations, this they believe has helped reduced the stress of employees involved in the process.

Summary of benefits of the training

The hospital believes the training has helped to refresh the HR members and investigating officers' understanding of disciplinary and grievance investigations, and good practice approaches around this area. The HR team regularly attends Acas training and appreciate the amount of information that Acas' tutors are able to convey in a manageable format.

"I feel that they [Acas' tutors] manage to get a lot of information into a very short space of time but you do seem to take all that information in, I don't know how they do it."

Table 3.7 Colchester English Study Centre

Background to the Organisation
<p>Colchester English Study Centre is a private English Language school that provides language classes to overseas students. The organisation employs approximately 50 staff.</p>
Participation in the Open Access training
<p>Two members of staff in the organisation attended an Open Access training event on Employment Law and Equality and Diversity in early 2010. The main reason for attending the training was to develop their knowledge around Employment Law, to help them resolve situations and problems that could potentially arise in the workplace.</p> <p>The training was tutor lead and included lectures on facts about the law, as well as discussions with colleagues on issues around this subject area.</p> <p>The representatives of the organisation who attended the training felt the trainer had been well informed, very professional, and happy to discuss issues raised by delegates. They also found packs provided at the training useful. More importantly, the fact that the training could be accessed locally was a bonus as it cut down their travel time.</p>
Outcomes of the training
<p>The training attended by members of staff in the organisation has generated a number of outcomes. Firstly, staff involved in the training feel they are now '<i>better informed</i>' and therefore more able to deal effectively with employment issues that could potentially arise in their organisation. The training has also improved their knowledge of the subjects covered. As a result, they have reviewed and revised existing policies in line with legal requirements.</p> <p>Key changes that the Colchester English Study Centre has made since the training include introducing and revising policies and practices around Discipline and Grievance, Bullying and Harassment and Redundancy. The organisation originally had these policies described in their handbook; however these were written many years ago and '<i>had not been tested</i>'. They therefore felt that the policies needed to be '<i>more detailed and specific</i>' and updated in line with current changes in the law.</p> <p>One key lesson learnt as a result of the changes made was the need for managers to be well informed about Employment law. The organisation therefore plans to recruit an HR specialist who will keep them up to date with policies around this area.</p>
Impact of the training
<p>The organisation believes the changes made to their HR practices have impacted on the organisation in a number of ways, including improving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relations between management and employees; • communication within the organisation; and • leadership and management skills of line managers.

In addition to the above, the organisation feels the changes introduced have reduced the number of cases around employee grievances in the organisation. Overall, they believe the training has made them *'more efficient'* and are now in *'possession of the facts'* to enable them to handle employee disputes or grievances.

Summary of benefits of the training

Addressing employee disputes or grievances in any workforce the organisation feels can be disruptive and divide opinions, however, as they are now *'better informed'* as a result of the training, they feel they will be able to handle these issues more effectively in the future. They feel the training has given them the *'right tools'* to do this.

Table 3.8 Newcastle Futures

Background to the Organisation
Newcastle Futures is a small not for profit organisation with between 20 and 40 staff members. The organisation was formed in 2007 with a number of secondees from the public sector to provide tailored support to help local people into employment.
Participation in the Open Access training
Newcastle Futures do not have a formal HR function, and in the past have adopted the HR policies of secondees' home organisations. However, the organisation has recently recruited direct staff and therefore feels the need to develop its own HR policies. <i>"A third of people we employ now are direct employees so we cannot just emulate public sector, we were trying to ensure that what we did followed private sector,... we had to have our own policies in place so that's where Acas was very supportive and helpful to us."</i> Members of the management team attended a number of Acas training sessions including Equality and Diversity, Redundancy and a Getting it Right Session on Disciplinary and Grievances policy. The main reason for attending all of the training sessions was to improve the team's knowledge on these issues, and to help them develop clear and fair policies. The session outlined management and staff's responsibilities around disciplinary and grievance issues and provided practical examples and handouts. The management team feel that all of the sessions were pitched at the right level and provided a range of different examples of good practice. <i>"We went away using some good examples given by some of the other people, facilitated around the table. So it brought it all to life and we walked away with some really good resources which we could use in the future."</i>

Outcomes of the training

The training sessions have led to a number of outcomes. The management team believe they now have a good understanding of the subjects addressed at the training sessions, and feel more confident in dealing with issues that arise relating to these subjects. Newcastle Futures has also revised and formalised their existing policies, to ensure it meets the needs of their organisation.

Revising the disciplinary and grievance policy

Following the training, Newcastle Futures revised their Disciplinary and Grievance policy to ensure it focused on their organisation's structure.

Ongoing review of all policies

Newcastle Futures also regularly review all their HR policies, including their Disciplinary and Grievance policy, to ensure that they are up to date with any changes to legislation. These policies are reviewed every 6 months by senior management.

Ensuring staff understand all policies

Newcastle Futures ensure all their HR policies are circulated to their staff every 6 months, their staff are then asked to sign that they have understood and read these policies. However, after some discussions with their staff it became clear that not all staff had a full understanding of all policies. To overcome this issue, the organisation now outlines the main points of a different policy at their monthly team meetings to ensure all employees are aware of, and have a better and consistent understanding of all their policies.

The training has also raised Newcastle Futures awareness of the need to develop clear, unambiguous HR policies to ensure that all staff understand the company's and their own individual responsibilities.

"We've understood that you have to be clear that you know what you're doing, don't leave anything ambiguous at all. That if it's not in the policy and its not followed your in trouble. So make sure everything is in that policy that should be in the policy and that you review it regularly."

Impact of the training

With regards to the longer term impact, Newcastle Futures believe the revisions made to their Disciplinary and Grievance policy, alongside other HR policies has reduced the number of cases on employee grievances. This has resulted in a fairer redundancy process and improved staff morale.

Improved staff morale

As a result of the revised disciplinary and grievance policy, Newcastle Futures feel their senior management now have a clear understanding of how to address issues around this area which has given them confidence to explain the policy to their staff. This in turn has led to staff feeling more comfortable and motivated in their work.

"The training was about getting us prepared and equipped to feel that we're managing our HR process correctly. Which gives you the confidence and then in that sense makes your employees have faith you know what you're doing"

Reduced cases of employee grievances

Following the introduction of the revised Disciplinary and Grievance policy, management have become more aware of potential issues, and are more proactive in trying to resolve problems before they escalate to formal grievances. This has led to a reduction in the number of formal grievances that are made.

Fairer redundancy process

Newcastle Futures believe they now have a fairer redundancy process as a result of changes made to their HR policies and practices. For instance, one of the key areas they learnt from the training was how much notification for redundancy was needed by law; this has ensured that redundancy processes carried out within the organisation meets legal requirements.

Summary of benefits of the training

The training sessions the organisation believes has equipped them with the knowledge needed to develop coherent policies. The training packs provided at the training sessions are also used as useful references to address ad-hoc issues.

"These things might not come up until a while after the course and it's quite nice to have the material to refer back to just so in your head you know you've got it right."

They also feel the combination of the training and having access to Acas's advice on an ongoing basis, sets Acas's training apart from other training sessions.

"I think the training plus the advisory service is what we like about it...Most training courses you go on, you get the training that's it and then you go...but that there is that advisory service that connects to it and it doesn't seem separate... And we can meet the trainers again. Think that's a really good thing to have."

Table 3.9 QDP

Background to the Organisation
<p>QDP Services is an independent supplier of questionnaire data processing services with approximately 30 staff based in Manchester. Their clients consist of 70 per cent of English Colleges and a growing number of UK schools.</p>
Participation in the Open Access training
<p>QDP Services staff attend Acas training sessions a couple of times a year. This case study is based on the Sick Note to Fit Note session attended by one of their staff in July 2010. The staff attended the training to improve her knowledge of Attendance/ absence management procedures.</p> <p>QDP Services as a small company cover sick pay at the discretion of their management team; however there are very few cases when sick pay is not paid. In an attempt to combat an increase in the number of people taking sick leave, a representative from the organisation attended the Attendance/Absence management training session in order to improve their knowledge around this area. The training session covered different types of absences due to illness, and approaches to reducing the rate and length of sick leave. The session was accompanied by a pack of handouts.</p> <p>An aspect of the training that the organisation's representative who attended the training felt had worked particularly well was the number of opportunities offered during the day for participants to share their experiences around Attendance/ Absence management.</p> <p><i>"The other key thing I quite enjoy are the other companies that are there that have the same problems as you have, whether it be a small company or a large company, you've got the same pattern, the same people... so its nice to listen to other people's opinions in their problems... It's absolutely brilliant, that's why I like Acas."</i></p> <p>The representative also felt she had benefited from the knowledge and experience of the tutor:</p> <p><i>"They're absolutely brilliant, they know their stuff. I don't think I've ever been to an Acas course where I've thought the tutor wasn't any good...I wouldn't go otherwise."</i></p> <p>Overall, the representative felt the training session had given her ideas on how to tackle the rising number of sick leave absences.</p> <p><i>"It [the number of absences] was just creeping up and up and up and I didn't know what to do about it so that's why I went on the course and I got some really good ideas about how to manage it [absences]."</i></p>
Outcomes of the training
<p>The training session has led to a number of outcomes. The representative from QDP Services feels the training has improved her understanding of Attendance/ Absence management policies, and, consequently, has made her more confident in dealing with issues that may arise around this area.</p>

In addition to the skills and knowledge acquired by the representative through the training, QDP Services has revised their Attendance/Absence management and recruitment policies. The key revisions made to the absence management policy include introducing a return to work interview process, developing a formal flowchart for reporting sick absences and updating the induction process.

Introducing a return to work interview process

QDP Services felt there was a need for a formal return to work interview with staff that had been off work sick. The purpose of the return to work interview was to explore the nature of the absence and reflect on the staff member's absence record. In addition to this, QDP Services also changed the recording of sick absences to a rolling year, rather than the sick leave year. This made it easier for them to monitor absences.

Developing a formal flowchart for reporting sick absences

QDP Services had a process for reporting cases of sick absences; however, this had not been strictly adhered to.

As a result of the training which emphasised the need for a formal process, QDP Services has developed a flowchart which outlines the steps that employees need to take if they were off sick. This includes telephoning their line manager before 9am and every day of their absence. The only exception to this rule is if they are aware that the employee is likely to be off sick for several days.

Updating the induction process

QDP Services also updated their induction process for new starters which included their new policy around sick pay procedures. All new starters are therefore taken through the sickness and absence procedures and provided with a copy of the policy.

One of the key lessons that QDP felt they had learnt from the introduction of these changes was the importance of raising staff's awareness of sick leave procedures.

"I think before, even though we've always monitored sick, I think they thought it was a bit airy fairy, but now they know these things are in place and you will have a return to work interview, that we're looking at it and recognising it."

Impact of the training

Reduction in absences taken due to illness

Although it was acknowledged that external factors played a part, the QDP representative believes the introduction of the flowchart for reporting sick absences and the changes they have made around their Absence/Attendance policies have had an impact by reducing the number of days taken off by staff to due to sickness. They feel these processes have acted as a deterrent for those who may want to abuse the system.

Summary of Benefits of the training

QDP believe the training has helped to increase their understanding of managing sickness absences which has contributed to a reduction in the number of sick leave taken by employees.

Table 3.10 Anon Org

Background to the Organisation
Anon Org is a public sector SME operating in the transport sector.
Participation in the Open Access training
<p>Three members of staff attended two training workshops: Discipline and Grievance; and Conducting Investigations.</p> <p>Being part of the public sector, Anon Org already had a number of policies in place, however employment law was perceived to becoming more complicated. It was hoped that the training course could provide some clarity and help avoid future problems.</p> <p><i>"You hear about an increase in cases, and we [in this country] appear to be heading for more tribunals. We want to avoid that and thought it would be good for us to go on a course."</i></p> <p>The training they attended involved a variety of different activities including: group work; question and answer sessions; open discussions; and examination of case studies and real-life scenarios. These were found to be the most useful aspects of the training as it allowed them to make decisions based on real life cases, to discuss these decisions and to discover the outcomes of these scenarios.</p> <p><i>"You were given the answers of why they [tribunals] reached a decision and what they considered in reaching a decision. You were given the pitfalls to wade through."</i></p> <p>The staff members who attended the training felt that the most valuable aspect of the training was the factual scenario which practically demonstrated how the process works and how decisions are reached.</p> <p><i>"I found it absolutely brilliant, it was put over extremely well, they were extremely knowledgeable."</i></p> <p><i>"It took the mist away about why it's [employment law] getting more complicated, which does help, it makes you stop and think and look from a wider perspective"</i></p>
Outcomes of the training
<p>This training session has resulted in a number of outcomes. The management team feel they have a strong understanding of the subjects addressed in the course, and, as a result are not only more confident and effective in dealing with matters linked to the training, but are also more able to prevent issues occurring in the future. In addition to the skills and knowledge acquired by the management team, the organisation has modified its approach to dealing with complaints, grievances, and disciplinary issues, and reviewed and revised a number of policies.</p> <p>Revision of practices</p> <p>Previously all issues relating to complaints, grievances, and disciplinary issues were dealt with formally as a matter of procedure; however the training has</p>

helped instil a different mindset, particularly with regard to the examination of wider issues, which demonstrated the value of initially addressing issues informally before taking a formal route. One example demonstrating the value of this new approach was around a back-pay issue. Similar issues had arisen previously which had been dealt with formally and had proved time-consuming and complicated to investigate, when a new complaint about back-pay arose after the training course, it was dealt with informally and was resolved (in the employee's favour) in an efficient and a shorter timeframe.

"From my perspective I can handle things better, because you know the rules... You defuse situations before they get to that stage [tribunals], because you can talk to staff about it in more depth and gives wider knowledge."

"Previously what would happen was that a grievance would come in and we would deal with that as a formal grievance. Whereas following advice received from the workshop, much more emphasis was put on informal resolution. It seems to have worked and now we have very few grievances which become formal grievances, which can only be a good thing."

Policy review and revision

Anon Org has also reviewed its **Absence and Attendance Management, Contracts and Written Statements**, and **Disciplinary and Grievance** policies as a result of the training.

The main revision made to its **Absence and Attendance Management** policy was on the number of days that employees could take off sick. Previously employees were required to produce a medical certificate for sickness absences of 15 days (including days not worked); this has been amended to absences of 10 consecutive working days.

All three policies were revised to mirror the headings used in the Acas Code of Practice and to make reference to the code where this was relevant. Other revisions were around minor wording and rephrasing to make them accessible to both staff and the management team.

"Some policies are woolly and we wanted them to be more specific. Certainly from where I'm sat they're more exact, so when you deal with it everyday you can be more accurate."

Overall, the main benefit of the training the organisation believes was the knowledge gained by the staff who attended the training. This has helped them to change the management team's approach to disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Impact of the training

The revision of the management teams approach had led to a number of key impacts which include:

- fewer cases of staff grievances;
- improved communication within the organisation; and
- improved relations between management and staff.

Fewer cases of staff grievances

The management team feel they are more confident and proactive in providing advice around potential discipline and grievances issues. This includes trying to resolve issues informally before they become serious and require a formal investigation. This has resulted in less cases being pursued formally and therefore a reduction in costly investigations.

"From a management perspective looking at resolutions, even in the case of disciplinaries, at an informal level if at all possible, rather than escalating them immediately into a formal issue ... What we've seen is a significant reduction in the number of disciplinaries relating to misconduct and from grievances relating to employment relationships or the manager/employee relationships."

"We haven't had many grievances, so from a workload point of view it's brilliant. Grievance investigations can be lengthy and can be complex. A reduction in formal grievances can only be a good thing. Things are being dealt with at an informal and localised level."

Improved communication within the organisation

As a result of an improvement in staff's understanding of the disciplinary and grievance investigation processes, the management team feel they are better equipped to defuse potential situations.

"From my perspective I can handle things better, because you know the rules... You defuse situations before they get to that stage [tribunals], because you can talk to staff about it in more depth and give wider knowledge."

Improved relations between management and staff

In addition, though there haven't been any major issues with poor employee relations within the organisation, there has been a *'them and us'* attitude over the years between operating and office staff. There was a perception that this was improving partly due to the change in approach used by the management team.

"Relationships are improving and there is a little more respect than there used to be...The fact that [the management] are no longer 'jumping the gun' [straight to a hearing] may have been a contributory factor in this."

Summary of the Benefits of the training

The organisation believes that the training has helped, in some cases to refresh the management team understanding and approaches to disciplinary and grievance issues.

Though they had not been aware of Acas training previously, other staff have subsequently attended Acas training sessions, and there are plans in place to utilise Acas' services in future.

"The knowledge I gained in one day is helping me perform better, which has to be good doesn't it? I talk to people a bit different in the way I handle it. You can fall foul by not being so knowledgeable. Now I'm more professional...For me it's a big tweak."

"It made us think differently and outside of the box".

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study set out to assess the impact of Acas's Open Access training services on delegates who had attended the training and their respective organisations. This section draws together the key findings by addressing the questions that it aimed to explore.

4.1 Addressing the key evaluation questions

4.1.1 Proportion of delegates reporting that the training provided by Acas resulted in a change in policy or practice

A key requirement in assessing the impact of Acas's Open Access training services was to provide evidence of Acas's compliance with its Service Level Agreement (SLA) in relation to its Key Performance indicator on the *"80% of delegates reporting that the training provided by Acas resulted in a review or change in policy or practice"*. The survey evidence highlights that a significant proportion of the delegates who had attended the training reported that they had reviewed, revised or introduced one or more new policies in the respective organisations as a result of the training. Overall, the study highlights that on average the majority (76 per cent) of the delegates had either reviewed, revised, introduced or planned to make some changes to their HR policies and practices and that, in 41 per cent of the cases, those who had made changes or were planning to would not have done so without the support received from Acas.

Of the 1,374 delegates who attended training between 1 March to 31 August 2010 and responded to the question:

- Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) had reviewed one or more policy or practice since attending the training
- Over half (53 per cent) had revised one or more policy or practice
- Just under a quarter (23 per cent) had introduced one or more new policy or practice
- Over a quarter (27 per cent) planned to do so in the near future.

4.1.2 Impact of the training on delegates and their respective organisations

The changes made by delegates were mainly with regards to their Absence and Attendance management policies, reflecting the fact that the majority of the delegates had attended training in this area. Approximately two thirds (65 per cent) reported that they had made changes to their Absence and Attendance management policies. In addition, over a quarter (27 per cent) had made changes to their Discipline and Grievance policies (the second most common area) which was also the second most common attended event subject after Attendance and Absence management training.

Across the board delegates were more likely to report that they had reviewed one or more policy or practice. However, there were minor differences in some cases. On average those from small organisations (1-49 employees) were more likely to report that they had introduced one or more new policy. This perhaps reflects the fact that these organisations are less likely to have written policies.

4.1.3 Longer term impact of the Open Access training

The training has also led to positive changes in the organisations of delegates who were involved. For example, the survey evidence suggests that changes made by delegates in their respective organisations have improved communication within their respective organisations (30 per cent reported that it had), improved relations between management and employees (26 per cent), improved leadership and management skills of managers (24 per cent); and reduced staff absenteeism (24 per cent).

4.1.4 Gaps in the training

There were no significant gaps in the training in relation to the development needs of the participants. As outlined in the study, the majority (93 per cent) were either very satisfied with the training or fairly satisfied, only a small proportion (4 per cent) were dissatisfied. Those who were dissatisfied mainly felt the training had either been very basic or too generic. This may suggest the need for Acas to provide some more information on the content of the training at the booking stage so that delegates can make an informed decision on whether or not the training they plan to attend will address their needs.

4.2 Recommendations

The study suggests that overall the training has impacted on a number of areas, including raising the skills and awareness of the delegates' involved which have subsequently resulted in changes being made to their HR policies and practices. The evidence also highlights that these changes have impacted on employer and employee relations across the board. The only criticism around the training for a minority was in relation to the fact that it was generic, this suggests that some delegates may have been keen to address specific areas that they felt the training did not cover. Hence, in terms of overall recommendations, Acas may want to consider discussing with their trainers the possibility of having the needs of delegates assessed prior to delivery, so that the training can be tailored to delegates needs where appropriate. This will benefit delegates from smaller organisations who are less likely to have written policies and therefore may be more interested in more in depth sessions. Acas may also want to consider expanding the description currently provided for different product types by including the type of organisations that are more likely to benefit from a particular product type; again this will ensure that delegates are well informed about the type of product that is likely to address their specific needs.

Annex One: Further tables

Table A.1 Number of participants accessing Open Access Training in the period 1 March – 31 August 2010, by product type and main topic of training

	Key Point Session	Getting It Right Session	In-Depth Session	Conference	Total	Percentage
Attendance / Absence Management	2,876	788	11		3,675	63.5%
Bullying and Harassment		66			66	1.1%
Change Management	6			95	101	1.7%
Conflict / Mediation / Relationship Issues			51		51	0.9%
Discipline and Grievance		271	188	48	507	8.8%
Employing People			13		13	0.2%
Employment Law (General)	182	183	19		384	6.6%
Equal Pay			10		10	0.2%
Equality and Diversity (General)	216	21	42	126	405	7.0%
Flexible Working, Hours and Holidays	1				1	0.0%
Investigations			10		10	0.2%
Other			27	51	78	1.3%
Performance Management		81	12		93	1.6%
Recruiting, Contracting and Employing People		121	1	61	183	3.2%
Redundancy		110	14		124	2.1%
Stress Management		12	3		15	0.3%
Supervision / First Line Management			51		51	0.9%
Working Families / Parental Rights		6			6	0.1%
Written Statements / Contracts		13			13	0.2%
Total	3,281	1,672	452	381	5,786	100.0%
Percentage	56.7%	28.9%	7.8%	6.6%	100.0%	

Source: Acas monitoring data

Table A.2 Satisfaction with training, by topic area and size of organisation

	Base	Percentage very or fairly satisfied with training	Percentage very or quite likely to recommend training to a colleague or manager
Total	1,393	93.1%	85.9%
Attendance/Absence Management (i.e. "from 'sick note' to 'fit note')	717	93.7%	84.9%
Bullying and Harassment	19	100.0%	89.5%
Conflict & Mediation Training	22	100.0%	68.2%
Discipline and Grievance	162	96.9%	94.4%
Employment Law	166	93.4%	90.4%
Equality and Diversity	109	86.2%	75.2%
Recruiting, Contracting & Employing People	35	88.6%	91.4%
Redundancy	37	94.6%	89.2%
Stress Management	6	83.3%	83.3%
Supervision/First Line Management	74	93.2%	89.2%
Managing Change	26	84.6%	73.1%
Other	20	80.0%	80.0%
Number of employees:			
0 employees	18	94.4%	88.9%
1-4 employees	20	85.0%	80.0%
5-9 employees	56	91.1%	87.5%
10-24 employees	148	92.5%	85.6%
25-49 employees	180	97.2%	89.9%
50-99 employees	207	94.7%	90.3%
100-249 employees	268	95.1%	86.9%
250- 499 employees	171	90.6%	81.3%
500+ employees	313	90.0%	82.3%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base n=1374.

Table A.3 Percentage of participants giving different reasons for attending the training, by topic area (most attended topic areas only)

Reason	Attendance / Absence Management	Discipline and Grievance	Employment Law	Equality and Diversity	Supervision / First Line Management
To learn how to deal with a specific situation or problem that has arisen in the workplace	27.5%	45.5%	42.0%	18.7%	52.7%
To learn how to respond to a situation or problem that may occur in the future	59.7%	77.3%	63.0%	38.0%	70.3%
To improve my knowledge of the subject covered by the course	81.2%	81.8%	83.3%	82.5%	70.3%
To learn a new subject area	23.0%	22.7%	16.0%	12.7%	18.9%
To learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subject covered by the course	71.3%	27.3%	66.0%	71.1%	39.2%
I was asked to attend by others in my organisation	12.7%	18.2%	17.9%	10.8%	43.2%
To develop a new policy or procedure	16.9%	13.6%	18.5%	15.7%	5.4%
To review or revise any existing policy/policies to ensure best practice	58.3%	31.8%	46.3%	57.2%	16.2%
To help me to prepare for a qualification	1.1%	0.0%	4.3%	4.2%	5.4%
To help deliver training to others in my organisation	0.4%	4.5%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%
To keep up to date with new legislation	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	4.5%	1.9%	0.6%	0.0%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base=1,388

Table A.4 Percentage of participants giving different reasons for attending the training, by product type

Reason	Conference	Getting It Right Session	In-Depth Session	Key Point Session
To learn how to deal with a specific situation or problem that has arisen in the workplace	17.3%	38.0%	41.1%	22.3%
To learn how to respond to a situation or problem that may occur in the future	42.0%	60.8%	58.9%	51.4%
To improve my knowledge of the subject covered by the course	81.5%	79.5%	84.8%	81.2%
To learn a new subject area	11.1%	17.5%	17.9%	21.4%
To learn how to comply with legal requirements relating to the subject covered by the course	46.9%	64.6%	56.3%	74.9%
I was asked to attend by others in my organisation	14.8%	19.4%	18.5%	10.8%
To develop a new policy or procedure	13.6%	17.3%	19.2%	16.8%
To review or revise any existing policy/policies to ensure best practice	44.4%	48.6%	43.0%	59.8%
To help me to prepare for a qualification	1.2%	4.7%	2.6%	1.2%
To help deliver training to others in my organisation	0.0%	0.4%	3.3%	0.6%
To keep up to date with new legislation	3.7%	0.9%	0.0%	0.7%
Other	4.9%	0.6%	0.7%	0.1%

Source: Ecorys Survey, Base=1,388

Table A.5 Percentage of participants who tend to agree or strongly agree with each statement, by topic area, product type and size of organisation

	Good understanding of the subjects addressed in the course	Feel more confident dealing with matters relating to the subjects addressed in the course	Have dealt more effectively with matters relating to the subjects addressed in the course	Feel more able to prevent problems relating to the subjects addressed in the course
Main topic:				
Attendance/Absence Management	92.9%	90.5%	76.6%	78.8%
Discipline and Grievance	94.4%	92.6%	83.8%	82.0%
Employment Law	89.5%	89.6%	74.4%	79.4%
Equality and Diversity	87.0%	82.4%	54.2%	70.4%
Supervision/First Line Management	91.8%	84.9%	78.9%	77.8%
Product type:				
Conference	85.2%	80.0%	69.2%	67.1%
Getting It Right Session	92.2%	89.0%	76.3%	79.8%
In-Depth Session	92.6%	88.6%	78.1%	77.9%
Key Point Session	91.6%	89.9%	73.7%	78.5%
Number of employees:				
0 employees	87.5%	88.2%	73.3%	80.0%
1-4 employees	90.0%	90.0%	75.0%	80.0%
5-9 employees	91.1%	89.1%	71.2%	83.6%
10-24 employees	93.8%	90.4%	71.3%	77.1%
25-49 employees	95.5%	94.4%	81.0%	82.8%
50-99 employees	93.2%	92.2%	77.0%	83.4%
100-249 employees	91.3%	89.8%	76.5%	77.9%
250- 499 employees	89.9%	84.0%	74.1%	72.1%
500+ employees	88.7%	84.8%	70.9%	75.0%
Total	91.6%	88.9%	74.8%	78.2%

Source: Ecorys Survey

Table A.6 Percentage of participants who tend to agree or strongly agree with each statement, by topic area and size of organisation

	Base	Introduced one or more new policy	Reviewed one or more policy or practice	Revised one or more policy or practice	Planned to introduce one or more new policy or practice	Revised any area of practice relating to the issues addressed in the training
Number of employees:	1393	22.8%	64.3%	52.8%	27.1%	54.7%
0 employees	18	14.3%	58.8%	40.0%	16.7%	53.3%
1-4 employees	20	35.0%	45.0%	25.0%	40.0%	55.0%
5-9 employees	56	32.6%	60.8%	45.8%	28.3%	50.0%
10-24 employees	148	29.8%	62.1%	47.2%	26.1%	48.4%
25-49 employees	180	26.1%	69.0%	58.1%	31.7%	51.0%
50-99 employees	207	22.3%	71.8%	54.9%	25.3%	54.8%
100-249 employees	268	24.4%	65.7%	56.4%	27.4%	57.8%
250- 499 employees	171	20.0%	63.1%	55.8%	31.5%	61.3%
500+ employees	313	16.2%	60.2%	51.1%	23.3%	54.3%

Table A7: Percentage of delegates that had made changes by Topic Type

Topic Area	Total	Introduced one or more new policy	Reviewed one or more policy or practice	Revised one or more policy or practice	Planned to introduce one or more new policy or practice	Revised any area of practice relating to the issues addressed in the training
Total	1393	22.8%	64.3%	52.8%	27.1%	54.7%
Not Attended A/AM	550	25.1%	58.4%	49.1%	33.5%	50.4%
A/AM and other	160	37.6%	74.7%	63.8%	43.1%	66.2%
Only AM- Other non Fit note*	81	21.6%	44.0%	36.6%	30.1%	44.0%
Only AM- ONLY Fit note	602	16.8%	69.7%	55.7%	16.2%	57.3%

Table A8: Percentage of delegates that had reported impact across the different sample categories

Impacts	Total		Not Attended A/AM		A/AM and other		Only AM- Other non Fit note*		Only AM- ONLY Fit note	
	Base	%	Base	%	Base	%	Base	%	Base	%
Total	1047	100.0%	394	100.0%	130	100.0%	48	100.0%	475	100.0%
Skipped/ Not applicable	11	1.1%	3	.8%	3	2.3%	1	2.1%	4	.8%
Not answered/ Refused	129	12.3%	44	11.2%	9	6.9%	0	.0%	76	16.0%
Improved staff morale/motivation	107	10.2%	39	9.9%	19	14.6%	14	29.2%	35	7.4%
Reduced Employment Tribunal cases	73	7.0%	49	12.4%	11	8.5%	1	2.1%	12	2.5%
Improved staff retention	57	5.4%	17	4.3%	11	8.5%	8	16.7%	21	4.4%
Reduced cases of employee grievances	116	11.1%	64	16.2%	20	15.4%	8	16.7%	24	5.1%
Reduced staff absenteeism	246	23.5%	40	10.2%	32	24.6%	22	45.8%	152	32.0%
Improved relations between management and employees	270	25.8%	109	27.7%	47	36.2%	21	43.8%	93	19.6%
Improved communication within the organisation	312	29.8%	126	32.0%	52	40.0%	20	41.7%	114	24.0%
Improved recruitment and selection procedures	116	11.1%	75	19.0%	24	18.5%	4	8.3%	13	2.7%
Improved the leadership and management skills of line manage	250	23.9%	115	29.2%	40	30.8%	14	29.2%	81	17.1%
Too early to say	17	1.6%	13	3.3%	2	1.5%	0	.0%	2	.4%
Yet to be implemented	6	.6%	4	1.0%	1	.8%	0	.0%	1	.2%
Updated policy	7	.7%	2	.5%	0	.0%	0	.0%	5	1.1%
No changes/ None	51	4.9%	13	3.3%	4	3.1%	0	.0%	34	7.2%
Ensured legislation is complied with across our organisation	19	1.8%	7	1.8%	1	.8%	0	.0%	11	2.3%
Ensured good practice across the organisation	18	1.7%	8	2.0%	0	.0%	1	2.1%	9	1.9%

A8

Raised awareness and understanding amongst our staff	32	3.1%	9	2.3%	4	3.1%	0	.0%	19	4.0%
Improved at least one policy, procedure or practice	6	.6%	2	.5%	0	.0%	0	.0%	4	.8%
Other	22	2.1%	10	2.5%	3	2.3%	2	4.2%	7	1.5%

