

Research Paper

Acas helpline survey 2007

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(The Institute for Employment Studies)

On behalf of Acas Research and Evaluation Section

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Acas Helpline Survey 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During February and March 2007, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) surveyed users of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) national telephone helpline. Acas helpline advisers gathered details of callers for the survey and all willing service users were sent a postal questionnaire (which included an on-line option). The survey yielded a response rate of 46 per cent (1,822 callers), with just over eight per cent (149 callers) opting for the on-line questionnaire.

Those surveyed

Gender representation was in women's favour with 70 per cent of all responses. Callers responding to this survey were also more likely to be:

- aged between 35 and 49 (with an average age of 43)
- in the ethnic category of 'white' (94 per cent)
- describing their religion as 'Christian' (75 per cent)
- describing their sexuality as 'straight or heterosexual' (93 per cent).

Nearly half of respondents (45 per cent) called the helpline as either current (39 per cent) or former employees. One-third (33 per cent) called as employers and the remaining one in five called on behalf of third parties.

In terms of their jobs, callers were more likely to be either in the 'managerial and professional' (48 per cent) or 'clerical and skilled manual' (34 per cent) occupational categories. Callers were also more likely to:

- work in the private sector
- work on a full-time basis
- come from smaller workplaces employing fewer than 50 staff
- work for organisations that have been in business more than five years
- work in the industrial sectors of public administration, education and health and distribution, hotels and restaurants
- work in organisations without an HR/personnel specialist at the workplace.

Current use of the helpline

The average number of calls made to the helpline in the last 12 months increased from 3.0 in 2005 to 3.69 in this year's survey. The highest number of repeat users were:

- those calling on behalf of an employer (with an average of 6.0 calls) as well as employers (an average of 5.0 calls)
- callers working in organisations with 250 to 499 employees (an average of 5.9 calls)
- those working for not-for-profit/voluntary organisations (an average of 5.2 calls).

In all, 53 per cent of callers managed to speak to someone on their first call and more than one in five (22 per cent) reported getting through after being held in a queue. However, a quarter of callers were either asked to call again due to all lines being busy or they hung up and re-called because they were kept waiting too long (only one per cent). The results showed that the numbers getting through on first attempt have declined significantly, from 90 per cent in the 2005 survey to 75 per cent in this survey. However, 82 per cent were satisfied with the length of time it took them to get through. Callers reporting getting through at first attempt were significantly more satisfied than those who were either asked to call again or those who hung up to re-call later.

Callers' awareness of the helpline and pre-call website usage

Recommendation from a work colleague was the source most frequently mentioned by callers when asked how they became aware of the Acas helpline. The Acas website was the second most frequently cited source, especially for employers and those calling on behalf of employers. In terms of website usage, 51 per cent of callers with internet access reported having tried to find the answer to their query on the Acas website before calling the helpline. The proportions trying the Acas website were higher amongst:

- employers
- callers aged between 25 and 34
- full-timers
- managers and professionals
- callers working in larger workplaces
- those with an HR specialist at their workplace.

Subject areas covered by calls

The five most commonly reported subject areas for calls to the helpline were found to cover:

- dismissal and grievance (24 per cent)
- redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers (17 per cent)
- maternity, paternity and adoption (13 per cent)
- contracts (12 per cent)
- holidays and working time (8 per cent).

Respondents' attitudes about the information provided and the Acas members of staff handling their calls

Nine out of ten callers either agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided by the Acas helpline was valuable. Similar proportions also agreed that the information provided answered their query in full (88 per cent) and helped them

decide what to do next (87 per cent). These proportions denote notable increases in agreement levels compared to the 2005 survey. Although the average scores for these three statements across the survey as a whole were very high, they were even higher for:

- callers without an HR specialist at their workplace
- those from very small organisations with one to four employees
- callers who were self-employed or working part-time
- those who worked in public administration, education and health.

Not surprisingly, callers who were asked to call again because all lines were busy reported lower average scores than those who got through immediately.

Elsewhere, a series of attitudinal statements which required callers to rate the manner in which helpline staff handled calls produced agreement levels in excess of 90 per cent. Almost all callers said that Acas staff were courteous and behaved in a professional manner (97 per cent). Very high proportions also reported that advisers presented the information in an impartial way (94 per cent), were knowledgeable (93 per cent), understood callers' queries (93 per cent), presented the information in an easily understandable way (93 per cent) and gave callers enough time to discuss their queries (92 per cent).

Following the call to the Acas helpline...

Following their call, more than one in four callers reported discussing the problem with management (or with their employees if they called as an employer). Furthermore, almost a quarter of callers said that they had sought or planned to seek assistance from other bodies following their call. This was particularly the case for those calling as former employees (51 per cent) and those who reported being dissatisfied with the service (60 per cent). Nearly one in five respondents reported that they had applied or planned to apply changes recommended by Acas.

Impact of calling on employers' policies and practices

Forty-eight per cent of all employers in this survey reported that their call had motivated them to update or improve existing policies, while only one in ten did not agree that their call had motivated them in this way. Forty-two per cent were not sure about this impact.

In all, 45 per cent of employers also agreed that their call had motivated them to implement a *new* policy/policies. Almost as many (44 per cent) were not sure about this impact, while 11 per cent did not think that their call had impacted on them in this way.

For both these aspects, employers reporting higher 'motivational impact' were:

- those without an HR specialist at their workplace
- those who reported getting through to the helpline immediately.

Impact of the helpline on Employment Tribunal claim decision-making

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of current as well as former employees reported having considered an Employment Tribunal (ET) claim before phoning the helpline. Those who were more likely to have considered making an ET claim prior to calling were:

- former employees
- male employees
- those working in construction.

When asked whether they had actually gone on to make a claim after their call, only 13 per cent said they had, while 14 per cent had decided against it. Employees (particularly former, rather than current) who had considered making a claim prior to calling were the group most likely to actually pursue this course of action.

Most employees calling the helpline (70 per cent) agreed that doing so had been influential in helping them reach an ET claim decision. Only eight per cent said that calling the helpline had not played a role in their decision-making, and for 22 per cent this was not an applicable response choice.

Employees considering an ET claim before their call who then went on to take either the action of making an ET claim *or* deciding against making such a claim were also compared to see how influential they had perceived their calls in terms of their decision-making. The results showed that higher proportions (90 per cent) of employees deciding *against* a claim reported their call as having been influential, as compared to those deciding to go ahead with such a claim (84 per cent).

The impact calculation of the calls regarding ET cases also suggests that, over the course of a 12-month period, approximately 16,000 cases can be said to have been avoided through the provision of information by the Acas helpline.

Overall satisfaction with the helpline

As in the 2005 survey, almost all callers (94 per cent) reported being satisfied with the service provided by the Acas helpline. The overall satisfaction levels were very high across all caller groups within the survey and these were even higher amongst:

- those calling on behalf of third parties
- callers from very small workplaces with one to four employees
- those without an HR specialist at their workplace
- callers whose calls fell under the main topic of family friendly policies
- callers getting through at first attempt.

Almost everyone who participated in the survey (97 per cent) said that they would use the helpline again. Consistent with the above findings, those calling on behalf of third parties, callers from very small organisations with one to four employees, and those without an HR specialist at their workplace gave prospective re-use responses which were higher than the survey average.

Ninety-five per cent of callers also reported that they would recommend the helpline to a friend or work colleague. Older respondents (aged 60 to 65), part-timers and callers from very small organisations with one to four employees were even more likely to do so. Also, consistent with the findings across this report, callers who got through immediately had the highest average score for recommending the helpline to others.

Conclusions

Taken together, the results show that callers with consistently higher satisfaction levels on almost all aspects covered by this survey were those who worked in very small organisations (with one to four employees) and those who did not have an HR/personnel specialist at their workplace. Those calling on behalf of third parties and callers aged 25 to 34 were also likely to be more satisfied groups on some aspects.

Furthermore, the length of time it takes callers to get through to the helpline seems to be a determining factor in their attitudes towards the service. Callers who got through at first attempt reported consistently more positive views across the full spectrum of satisfaction and attitudinal questions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2006, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) – an independent research and consultancy organisation – to conduct a customer satisfaction survey to collect feedback from users of its national telephone helpline service. Acas' Research and Evaluation Section (RES) regularly monitor customer usage of and attitude towards the Acas helpline. There have been previous customer surveys to this effect and the last survey was conducted in 2005. This survey, conducted between February and March of 2007, builds on the findings of the previous survey.

1.1 Background

The Acas national helpline provides advice on employment relations issues to employers, employees and their representatives, dealing with approximately 850,000 calls each year across 12 regional offices. Although there is a single national telephone number, calls are directed in the first instance to the office which is geographically closest to the location of the caller, and only when busy will they be re-directed to another office. Due in part to substantial rises in call volumes over recent years, such re-directions are an increasingly common occurrence.

The Acas helpline advisers play a very important part in the success of the helpline operation. As well as keeping up-to-date with often complicated information on a wide range of employment issues, they have to deal with callers sensitively and appropriately. The helpline is anonymous and callers' details are not systematically recorded. Therefore, special arrangements were put in place to collect caller details for this survey. In all, 3,979 callers agreed to take part in the survey and of these callers, 1,822 did actually return the completed questionnaires. A detailed presentation of the sample design and methodology, including response rates and the weighting issue are provided in Appendix 1. This main report presents the key findings from the survey.

2 RESPONDENT PROFILE

2.1 Biographical details

2.1.1 Gender

Seventy per cent of questionnaire respondents were female, which was quite similar to the proportion of 68 per cent in the 2005 survey. Some of the helpline staff who attended 'opinion-seeking exercises' – that is, focus groups where the initial findings of this survey were discussed – found this quite surprising. Based on everyday experience, they expected the gender split to be more even. They also stated that during the collection of names and addresses, they were under the impression that, as an approximation, the proportions of men and women who had agreed to take part in the survey were commensurate. Unfortunately, the information on gender was not recorded when Acas staff collected names of respondents agreeing to take part in the survey. When the data collection documentation ('log-sheets') were converted into a database, it was not possible to monitor the initial gender proportions as not all names contained corresponding titles or forenames. It would be useful to accordingly amend log-sheets used for the next data collection exercise to enable this analysis in the future.

2.1.2 Age

A high proportion of callers to the helpline (44 per cent) were aged 35 to 49, just under a quarter (23 per cent) were aged 50 to 59, and 20 per cent were aged between 25 and 34. Those aged 18 to 24 made up four per cent of all callers, seven per cent were aged 60 to 65, and only two per cent were aged over 65. On the whole, the age categories within this survey broadly mirrored the age categories of the previous survey (see Table 2.1), with a slight under representation of calls from those aged between 18 and 34. The mean (average) age for the sample was 43, which was exactly the same for those calling as employees, but slightly higher – at 43.8 – for those calling as employers.

Table 2.1: Age of respondents in both surveys (%)

	2005	2007*
18 to 24	5	4
25 to 34	21	20
35 to 49	40	44
50 to 59	26	23
60 to 64	5	7
65 and over	2	2
BASE	931	1,777

* = Non-responses are not included in the calculations of percentages and therefore, these are valid percentages

Source: IES Survey, 2007

2.1.3 Other personal characteristics

In terms of ethnicity, 94 per cent of callers classified themselves as 'white', which, as in 2005, matches the ethnicity proportions of the UK working population.

Thirteen per cent of callers declared that they had a long-term illness, health problem or disability. For seven per cent of these 13 per cent with a health problem or disability, this disability affected the amount or type of work they could do. Many of the helpline staff who attended the opinion-seeking exercises stated that they had, in recent years, been experiencing a notable increase in the number of calls regarding callers' health problems or disabilities with a particular emphasis on stress and depression.

The questions about respondents' religion and sexuality were introduced for the first time in this survey. The majority of callers (75 per cent) classified themselves as Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations), 22 per cent said 'none' and the remaining three per cent ticked other religions – such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist.

The sexuality question had a relatively high percentage of missing data as five per cent did not want to give this information. Of those who responded, 93 per cent classified themselves as 'straight or heterosexual' and two per cent as 'gay or lesbian or homosexual'.

2.2 Employment type of callers

Callers were asked, when they had rung the helpline if they were calling as an employer, employee, a former employee, or on behalf of either an employer or an employee. The proportions are given below in Table 2.2. When the categories of employees and former employees were grouped together, employees formed the largest group of callers using the Acas helpline with 45 per cent. Although there were slightly higher number of employees ringing the helpline during this survey than there were in the previous survey (41 per cent of employees and former employees in 2005), the proportions seem to represent the actual distribution of calls received by the helpline.

Table 2.2: Type of callers in both surveys (%)

	2005	2007*
As an employer	35	33
As an employee	35	39
As a former employee	6	6
On behalf of an employer	13	13
On behalf of an employee	9	8
Not stated	1	2
BASE	931	1,788

Note: * = Non-responses not included in 2007 data.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

2.3 Job details

Callers responding to the survey were predominantly from smaller individual workplaces – 63 per cent of respondents' workplaces employing fewer than 50 employees. This proportion was quite similar in the previous survey (2005), which saw 67 per cent of callers coming from workplaces with less than 50 employees. More than half of all respondents (59 per cent) worked within the private sector, with 26 per cent working for the public sector and eight per cent for not-for-profit/voluntary sector organisations.

The industrial sectors generating the greatest number of calls were public administration, education and health (21 per cent), distribution, hotels and restaurants (20 per cent), manufacturing (13 per cent), banking, finance and insurance (12 per cent) and transport and communication (10 per cent). The majority of callers (75 per cent) tended to work for organisations that have been in operation for more than five years. Only three per cent of callers stated that their organisation had been in business less than 12 months.

More than four in ten callers (42 per cent) indicated that their workplace formed part of a larger organisation. Of these callers, almost a quarter (24 per cent) worked for organisations with more than 5,000 employees, whilst more than a quarter (27 per cent) did not know the size of their organisation as a whole.

When asked if their workplace had a personnel or human resources specialist, 42 per cent said that this was the case. This compares with 34 per cent in the 2005 survey – indicating a notable increase in the proportion of callers from organisations with an HR specialist. It is not surprising that, the larger the organisation, the more likely it was that they had a HR specialist. Whilst only 15 per cent of those with one to four employees reported having a HR specialist, the equivalent proportion was 90 per cent for those with more than 250 employees.

In terms of callers' job details, more than two-thirds (69 per cent) stated that they were full-time employees. Twenty-two per cent of all callers were part-time employees, nine per cent were self-employed and just under one per cent said they were an agency worker or a temp. A large proportion of respondents (48 per cent) were in the occupational category of 'managers and professionals', 34 per cent were in the 'clerical and skilled manual' group, 10 per cent were in 'services and sales' and eight per cent were in the 'operatives and unskilled' category.

A detailed breakdown of the proportions of the employer and job characteristics of survey respondents are summarised in the tables in Appendix 2. It is worth noting here that, in terms of representativeness, the respondents' profiles regarding ethnicity, disability and their job characteristics were quite similar to the UK working population (as reported in the Spring 2007 Labour Force Survey). However, as compared to the working population in the UK, the age and gender profiles of callers revealed under-representation of males and younger callers (those aged 18 to 24).

2.4 Regularity of current use of the helpline

Callers in this survey were asked approximately how many times in the last year they had used the Acas helpline. They were instructed to include the call where they were asked to take part in the survey as there was a high proportion of callers giving the 'none' response to this question in the previous survey. There was a significant

improvement as a result of this clarification as the number of callers answering 'none' went down from seven per cent in 2005 to one per cent in this survey.

Two-thirds of callers reported using the helpline up to three times in the last 12 months. Nine per cent said they had called the helpline more than 10 times. The average number of calls to the helpline was 3.69 (3.00 in the previous survey) but in 13 cases, the number of calls given was very high, varying between 30 and 99. Therefore, the median score of 2.0 seems to be a better indicator of current use of the helpline.

There were some significant sub-group differences in the average number of calls made to the helpline. Those calling on behalf of an employer had used the helpline most frequently by an average of six calls (a median score of 4.0) in the last year. This was followed by those calling as employers with an average of five calls (a median score of 3.0). The number of calls made by those calling on behalf of an employee was very similar to the survey average with 3.6 (but a median score of 1.0) and those calling as former employees made the lowest number of calls with 1.7 (a median score of 1.0).

Managers and callers in the professional occupations reported using the helpline significantly more frequently than the survey average, with a mean score of 4.4 calls (a median score of 3.0), whilst those in the services and sales groups made an average of 1.98 calls (a median score of 1.0) over the last year.

Those working in larger organisations reported making significantly higher numbers of calls. Callers working in companies with 250 to 499 employees made an average of 5.9 calls (a median score of 3.0) whilst those in smaller organisations (with one to four employees) made an average of 2.8 calls (a median score of 2.0) over the last 12 months. Callers who were from not-for-profit/voluntary organisations made significantly higher numbers of calls to the helpline with an average of 5.2 calls (a median score of 3.0), whilst those in public sector made an average of 3.0 calls (a median score of 2.0).

Interestingly, callers who worked in organisations with an HR specialist made significantly higher numbers of calls over the last year than those without such a specialist – with averages of 4.5 calls and 3.4 calls, respectively. However, when the median scores were compared, both groups of callers had the same median score of 2.0.

2.5 Respondents' awareness of workplace policies and procedures

2.5.1 Discipline and grievance procedures

The 2005 helpline survey sought to measure callers' awareness of the then-new Discipline and Grievance procedures. In order to re-assess callers' awareness of these procedures, callers were again asked, as far as they were aware, if there were formal discipline and grievance procedures in their workplace. In all, 76 per cent of all callers answered yes (73 per cent in the 2005 survey), 14 per cent said no and a further 10 per cent said they did not know. Those who answered 'yes' were then

compared to those who said 'no'. The results of the statistical testing¹ for sub-group comparisons showed significant differences between the following groups:

- Those calling as an employer were more likely to say 'yes' to having formal discipline and grievance procedures in their workplace (88 per cent) than those calling as a current or former employee (67 per cent). When the type of callers were disaggregated, the findings showed that those calling as a former employee were the least likely group to answer 'yes' to this question (only 49 per cent).
- Those aged 25 to 34 were most likely to say 'yes' to having formal discipline and grievance procedures (81 per cent) and those aged 18 to 24 least likely (58 per cent).
- Full-time employees were most likely (80 per cent) and those who were an agency worker or a temp were least likely (42 per cent) to give a 'yes' response.
- Those in the not-for-profit or voluntary sector were more likely to give a 'yes' answer (92 per cent) than those from the public sector (74 per cent).
- Callers in public administration, education and health were more likely to say yes (87 per cent) than those in construction (55 per cent).
- Managers and professionals were more likely to give a 'yes' response (84 per cent) than those in the operatives and unskilled professions (51 per cent).
- The larger the size of the organisation, the more likely employees were to say 'yes' to having formal discipline and grievance procedures – 57 per cent of those from organisations with one to four employees saying 'yes', compared with 96 per cent of those with more than 500 employees.
- Callers who reported having an HR specialist at their workplace were more likely (91 per cent) than those without a specialist to give a 'yes' response (69 per cent).

2.5.2 Policies regarding age discrimination

Given the recent publicity surrounding new regulations on Age Discrimination (October 2006), callers' awareness of this legislation was also measured by asking them whether their workplace had a formal policy regarding age discrimination. In all, 43 per cent said they were aware of such a formal policy, 29 per cent said 'no' and a further 27 per cent stated that they did not know. The results of the statistical testing² for sub-group analyses on awareness regarding this policy showed significant differences between the following sub-groups:

- Those calling as an employer (61 per cent) and those calling on behalf of an employer (59 per cent) were significantly more likely to give a 'yes' response to having a formal age discrimination policy than those calling as a former employee (20 per cent) or as an employee (30 per cent).

¹ Pearson's Chi-Square statistic has been used to test significance on cross-tabulations, with a cut-off of 95 per cent significance level.

² Pearson's Chi-Square statistic – as explained in previous footnote.

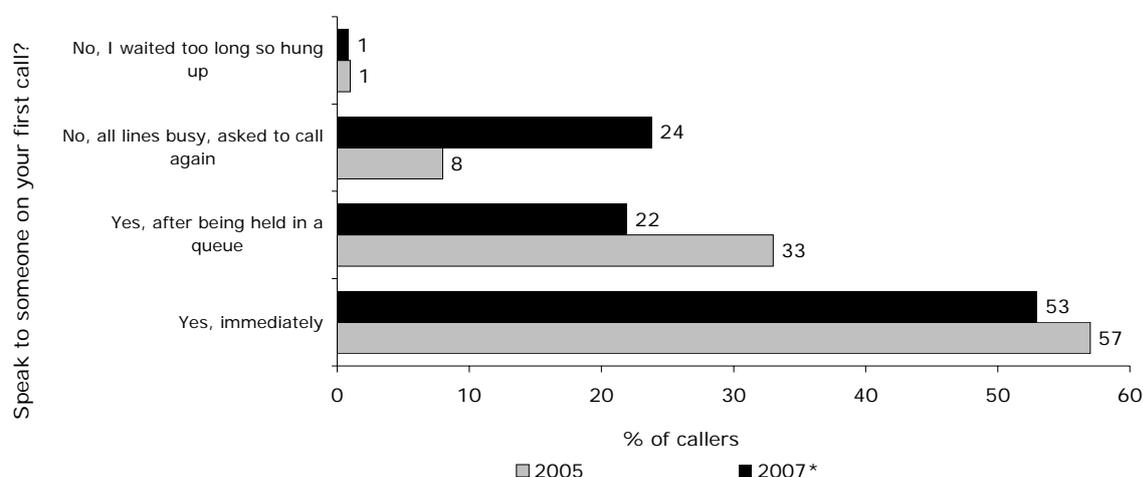
- Those who described themselves as 'white' were more likely to answer 'yes' (44 per cent) than those who said other than white (34 per cent).
- In terms of employment status, callers who were self-employed were more likely (49 per cent) than those working on a part-time basis (34 per cent) to give a 'yes' answer.
- Those in the not-for-profit or voluntary sector were most likely to say 'yes' (56 per cent) to having a formal age discrimination policy at their workplace.
- In terms of sector, callers in public administration, education and health were more likely to give a 'yes' response (49 per cent) than those in construction (30 per cent).
- Managers and professionals were more likely (52 per cent) than those in the operatives and unskilled professions (18 per cent) to say 'yes' to having a formal age discrimination policy at their workplace.
- There was a significant link with the size of callers' organisation; awareness levels increasing with the size of workplaces. Thirty-three per cent of those working in organisations with one to four employees said 'yes', as compared to 67 per cent of those working in organisations with more than 500 employees.
- Callers at workplaces with an HR specialist were more likely to say 'yes' (57 per cent) than those without (37 per cent).

3 THE ACAS HELPLINE

3.1 Getting through to the helpline

When asked if they managed to speak to someone on their first call, 53 per cent of callers reported having got through immediately. More than one in five (22 per cent) reported getting through after being held in a queue. In all, three quarters of callers managed to speak to someone on their first call. Almost a quarter of callers (24 per cent) said that all lines were busy and they were asked to call back. For a small number of callers (one per cent) wait-times were too long, so they hung up to re-call later. The comparison of responses from the previous survey, given below in Figure 3.1, shows that there has been a notable decrease in the proportions of callers getting through at first attempt.

Figure 3.1: Getting through to the Acas helpline



*Note: The base does not include the 'don't know' and non-responses for 2007 data

Base for 2005 = 931, Base for 2007 = 1,793

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Also evident in Figure 3.1 is the increase in the proportion of callers reporting that all lines were busy and they were asked to call again. This rose from eight per cent in 2005 to 24 per cent in this survey. Callers who failed to get through to the helpline in the first instance were asked how many times they had subsequently re-called before managing to speak to someone. Here, responses indicated that an average number of three (unsuccessful) calls were made before getting through. Only in a small number of cases (six per cent) had respondents called more than five times before getting through to an adviser. Taking all respondents together (including those who managed to speak to someone immediately), it follows that, on average, callers get through to the helpline on their second call.

The results of sub-group analysis of the proportions getting through to the helpline showed some significant differences. However, one needs to bear in mind that some of these differences may be related to the timing of calls, i.e. whether or not callers

were trying to contact the helpline at peak times¹. For example, those calling on behalf of an employee were more likely to report that they got through immediately than those calling as employers; 65 per cent as compared to 48 per cent. This may suggest that employers were much more likely to call at peak times³ than those calling on behalf of an employee.

Women were more likely to be asked to call back than men (27 per cent of women as compared to 19 per cent of men). Managers and professionals were more likely to report that they were asked to call back than those in operative and unskilled occupations; 27 per cent as compared to 17 per cent. Additionally, callers working in organisations with an HR specialist were more likely to report that they were asked to call back (29 per cent) than were those without such a specialist (22 per cent).

Most importantly, callers who reported being either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the overall service they received from the Acas helpline were likelier to report having been asked to call back (47 per cent) than their very satisfied/satisfied counterparts (23 per cent of whom confirmed having been asked to call back).

When the initial findings of the survey were presented to helpline advisers, they found the numbers of callers getting through at first attempt rather high, having anticipated much lower proportions. They reported receiving a substantial number of calls where callers complained about the number of times they had re-dialled before getting through. Many advisers therefore expressed interest in finding out the time of day callers dialled in order to get through at their first attempt.

It should of course be borne in mind that callers included in our sample were by definition those who were successful in getting through to the helpline at some point, and that the numbers given here will inevitably reflect that bias.

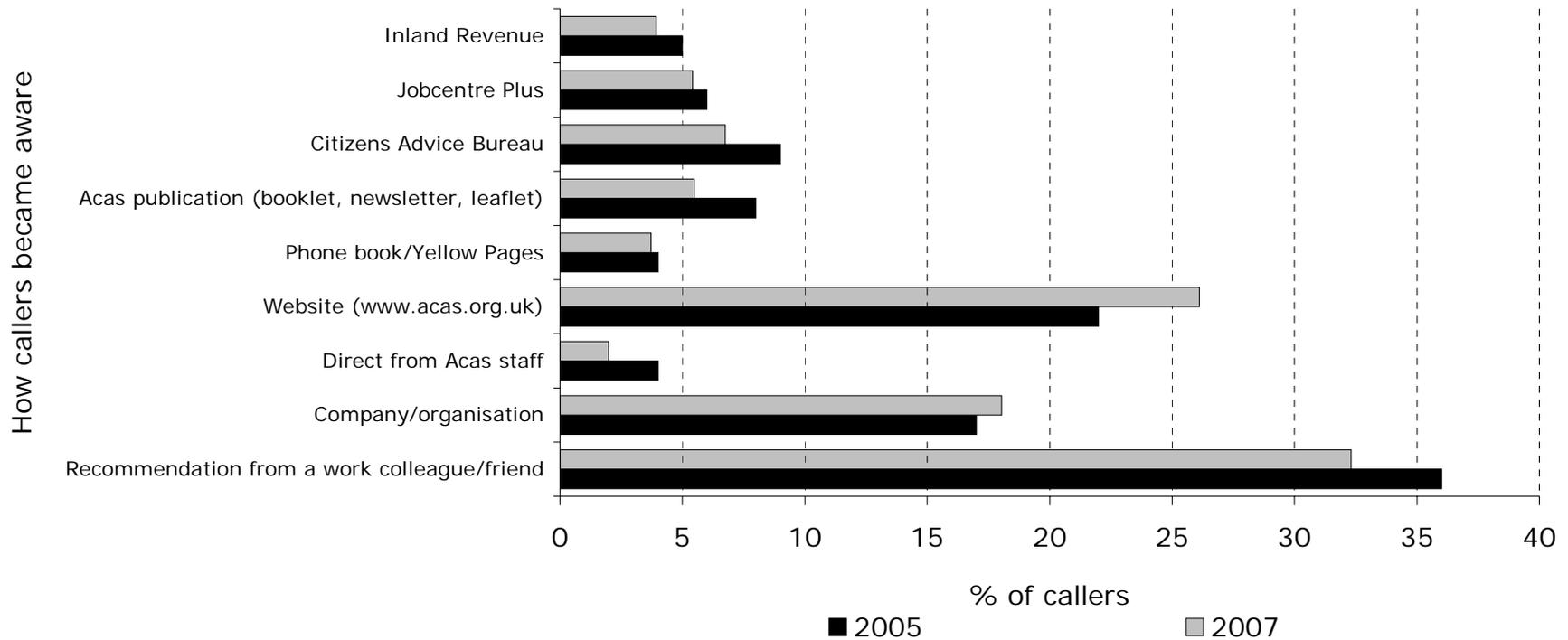
Overall, 82 per cent of all respondents were either satisfied (40 per cent) or very satisfied (42 per cent) with the length of time it took them to get through. Those who got through at the first attempt were significantly more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied in this sense (89 per cent; 71 per cent were very satisfied) than were those who had to call again (46 per cent; only eight per cent were very satisfied). Furthermore, there seems to have been a notable decrease in 'getting-through' satisfaction rates, from 49 per cent being very satisfied in the previous survey to 42 per cent in this survey. Similarly, in the 2005 survey, 84 per cent reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the length of time it took them to get through, as compared to 82 per cent in this survey.

3.2 Awareness of the Acas helpline

Callers were also asked how they had become aware of the Acas helpline. The most likely mentioned source was a recommendation from a work colleague or friend (32 per cent). This seems to be a likelier source for the employee groups than employers or third party callers, as higher proportions of employees and former employees became aware of the helpline in this way (39 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively).

³ At the time of writing, peak time periods are generally from around 10.30 to 12.00, and 14.00 to 15.30 (notwithstanding what are significant daily fluctuations in call volumes).

Figure 3.2: How did you become aware of the Acas helpline?



*Note: These responses sum to more than 100% as this was a multiple response question which allows respondents to tick all that apply to them.

Base for 2005 = 931, Base for 2007 = 1,807

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Figure 3.2 gives a comparison of responses to this question in 2007 with those from the 2005 survey. Notwithstanding some variation in the proportions, both surveys show that, after recommendations from colleagues and friends, it is the Acas website and callers' companies or organisations that were the other most likely mentioned sources. As was also reported in the 2005 survey, there were more employers than employees reporting that they had become aware of the helpline through their own company or organisation.

The Acas website was also more frequently mentioned by employers and more so by those calling on behalf of employers. Furthermore, perhaps not surprisingly, younger callers tend to mention the website more often. Although almost one in ten callers found out about the helpline via Citizen's Advice Bureaux (nine per cent) in the previous survey, this figure was down to seven per cent in 2007. However, this was still a very popular source among former employees (15 per cent).

3.3 Subject areas covered by calls

3.3.1 Subject areas of enquiries

The Acas helpline deals with a wide range of subject areas. Callers were therefore asked to indicate which topics they had sought information or advice on by nominating however many subject options applied to their query. To this end, respondents were given a list of 32 particular subjects, which can be summarised into ten broad headline subject areas. As they were asked to tick all that applied in the first instance, respondents providing multiple responses to this question were also asked to indicate the *main* subject area of their enquiry.

Table 3.1 (overleaf) gives the proportions provided for both the multiple responses and the single main subject area of calls. It also compares the proportions of the main subject areas found in this survey to those monitored systematically during a 12 month period by Acas' own management information systems.

Although showing some variations, these proportions for multiple and single response categories seem to mirror one another fairly closely. Furthermore, the proportions of single main subject areas reported are broadly analogous to those recorded systematically by Acas MI for the 12-month period covering February 2006 to January 2007, with the exception of a notably higher proportion of calls regarding maternity, paternity and adoption. However, taking into consideration that 70 per cent of the sample in this survey were women, it is perhaps understandable that there was an over-representation of this particular subject area.

In all, 'discipline, dismissal and grievance' was the most popular headline topic, with almost a quarter of callers (24 per cent) giving this as the main subject area of their call. The subject area of 'redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers' was the second most frequently mentioned category given by callers, at 17 per cent. Similar proportions of callers selected the main subject areas of 'contracts' and 'maternity, paternity and adoption' (12 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively). The 'holidays and working time' topic was cited by eight per cent and a similar proportion selected the area of 'absence, sickness and stress' (seven per cent). Fewer callers reported 'wages and the national minimum wage (NMW)' (five per cent), 'diversity and discrimination' and 'family friendly policies' as being the main subject of their calls.

Table 3.1: Helpline calls by headline subject (%)

	Subject of enquiries*	Main subject**	Headline subject provided by Acas for Feb 06/Jan 07
Discipline, dismissal and grievance	41	24	25
Contracts	31	12	15
Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers	27	17	16
Maternity, paternity and adoption	23	13	7
Absence, sickness and stress	22	7	6
Holidays and working time	22	8	11
Wages and NMW	12	5	7
Diversity and discrimination	11	4	4
Family friendly policies	9	3	2
Others	9	7	6
BASE	1,779	1,674	—

* these are multiple responses and add up to more than 100

** non-responses are not included in the base

IES Survey, 2007

3.3.2 Main subject area by different group of callers

The data was analysed to identify any significant differences between sub-groups in this survey in terms of main subject areas of calls. The results showed the following significant differences between types of caller:

- Employers were most likely to enquire about discipline, dismissal and grievance (30 per cent) and absence, sickness and stress (11 per cent).
- Current and former employees were more likely to enquire about redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers (21 per cent).
- Those calling on behalf of third parties were more likely to enquire about maternity, paternity and adoption (15 per cent) and holidays and working time (11 per cent).

There were also significant differences in terms of caller age:

- Those aged 25 to 34 were most likely to enquire about maternity, paternity and adoption (23 per cent).

- Respondents aged 60 and over were more likely to enquire about contracts (15 per cent), holidays and working time (13 per cent) and diversity and discrimination (nine per cent).
- Most calls about wages and NMW and discipline, dismissal and grievance came from those aged 18 to 24 (12 per cent and 30 per cent respectively).
- Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers was more likely to be the main subject area for those aged 50 and 59 (21 per cent).

In terms of respondents' gender and work status, the results showed that men were more likely to call about discipline, dismissal and grievance (29 per cent) while part-timers were least likely to call about this subject area (13 per cent). Those who were self-employed were most likely to enquire about absence, sickness and stress (12 per cent). Holidays and working time and family friendly policies were more likely to be the topic area of calls for those who worked part time (14 per cent and six per cent respectively).

Looking at the differences between callers from workplaces with an HR specialist as compared to those without, the results showed some dissimilarities between these two groups in terms of the proportions of the subject areas of their calls. For example, callers from organisations without an HR specialist were more likely to call about holidays and working time than were those with an HR specialist (11 per cent as compared to five per cent). Similarly, those without an HR specialist were also more likely to enquire about wages and NMW than were those with a specialist (six per cent as compared to three per cent). On the whole, however, the proportion of calls from those with an HR specialist at their workplace tended to be within very similar ranges to the survey average for the other subject areas.

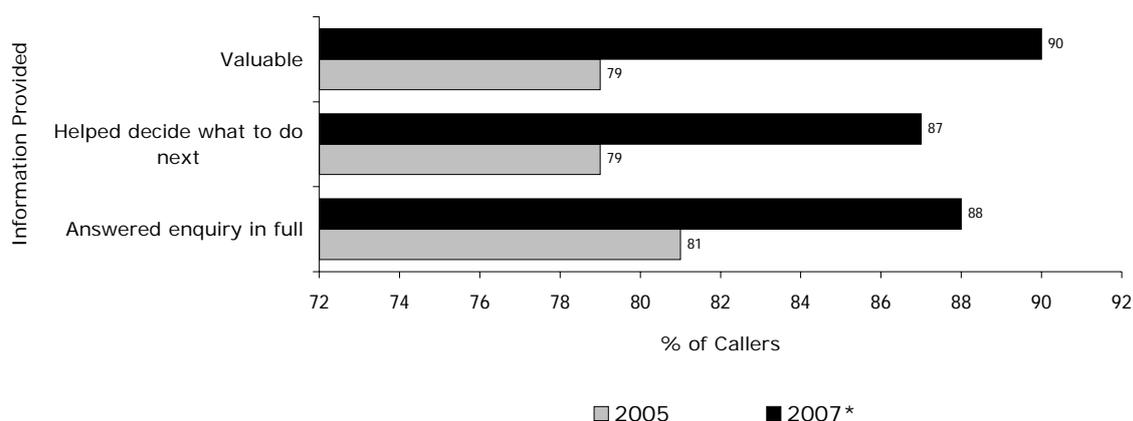
4 RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES

4.1 About the information provided

Callers were asked to indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with three statements with reference to the information provided to them during their call. Here, respondents were asked to use a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The first statement posited that the information provided to callers had answered their enquiries in full. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, the majority of callers (88 per cent) either agreed (44 per cent) or strongly agreed (44 per cent) with this statement. Eight per cent said 'neither' and only four per cent disagreed (three per cent) or strongly disagreed (one per cent) that the information provided to them had answered their enquiry in full. Furthermore, there seemed to be a notable increase in the agreement rates compared to the 2005 survey, when 81 per cent either agreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Figure 4.1: Callers' agreement rates about the information provided by the helpline advisers



Base for 2005= 931, Base for 2007= 1,725

Note: Non-responses are not included in the base for 2007 data

Source: IES Survey, 2007

The second statement put to callers was that the information provided by the helpline had helped them to decide what to do next. A very high proportion of callers (87 per cent) either agreed (46 per cent) or strongly agreed (41 per cent) with this second statement. Nine per cent said 'neither' and only four per cent either disagreed (three per cent) or strongly disagreed (one per cent) that their call had assisted them in deciding what to do next. The proportions agreeing with this statement also seemed to have improved since 2005 as 79 per cent either agreed or strongly disagreed in the previous survey, as compared to 87 per cent of this year's respondents.

The third statement advanced that the information provided to callers had been valuable to them. Nine in ten callers either agreed (43 per cent) or strongly agreed (47 per cent) that it had. Six per cent gave the response of 'neither' and only four

per cent said they either disagreed (three per cent) or strongly disagreed (one per cent) that the information provided was valuable. This statement induced the most notable increase in the agreement rate since the last survey, as the proportion who either agreed or strongly agreed in 2005 was 79 per cent.

4.1.1 Further analysis: differences between groups of callers

Because the percentages of callers who were in agreement with these three statements were so high, comparing proportions of callers agreeing to those disagreeing did not produce any meaningful subgroup analysis. Instead, a series of statistical tests⁴ were conducted to ascertain if there were significant differences between groups of callers, by examining the variations in their mean scores.

Using the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure callers' agreement levels, the results showed average scores of above 4.0, which indicates very high agreement rates among callers, for all three statements. The mean scores for these statements across the survey were:

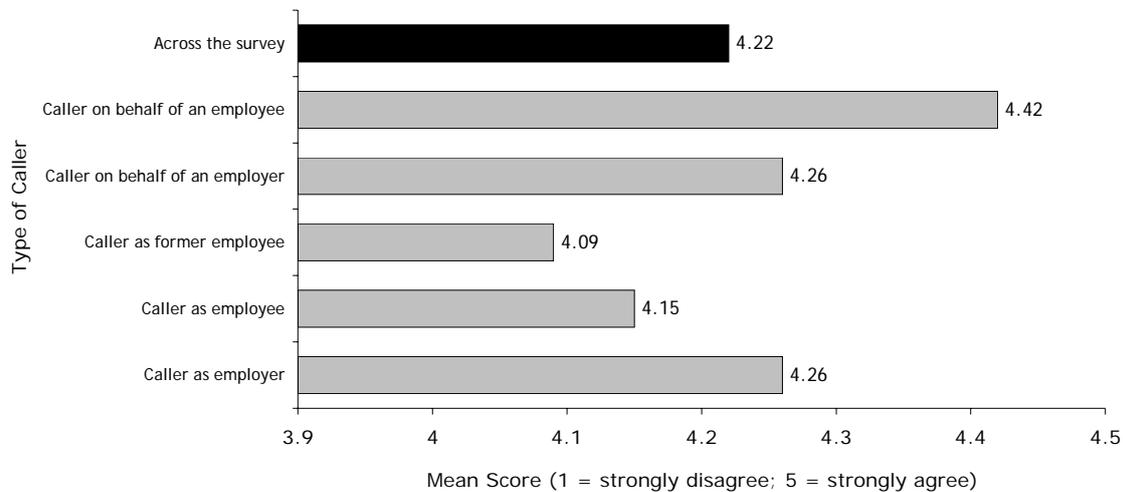
- 'The information provided answered callers' enquiry in full' gave a mean score of 4.27.
- 'The information provided helped callers decide what to do next' produced a mean score of 4.22.
- 'The information provided was valuable to callers' gave a mean score of 4.33.

The results of the sub-group analysis revealed that the agreement rates were very similar when callers were compared on the basis of gender, age, state of health and occupational classification. However, there were significant differences between different types of caller. For all three statements, those calling on behalf of an employee had the highest average agreement score as compared to the average score obtained across the survey.

As previously explained, callers in this survey were asked, when they had rung the helpline, if they were calling as an employer, an employee, a former employee, or on behalf of either an employer or an employee. Figure 4.2 shows the differences in agreement scores by these groups of caller on the statement about whether the information provided had helped them decide what to do next. As can be seen, those calling on behalf of an employee had the highest score of agreement with 4.42, as compared to the average score of 4.22 across the survey.

⁴ i.e. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) – a statistical test which compares more than two groups' means (averages) and gives a result indicating whether these means are significantly different.

Figure 4.2: Callers' agreement that the information provided helped them decide what to do next



Base = 1,631 (Note: non-responses are not included in the base)

Source: IES Survey, 2007

In terms of the work status of callers, the findings showed that, as compared to full-time employees, those working part-time and those self-employed had higher agreement rates on all three statements. There were also significant differences between the attitudes of those who worked in organisations with an HR specialist and those without. Callers without access to an HR specialist had higher mean scores on all three statements than those with an HR specialist at their workplace.

The statement about information having helped callers decide what to do next revealed a significant difference between industrial sector groups. While callers from public administration, education and health conferred higher mean scores (a score of 4.36), those from manufacturing gave lower mean scores (a score of 4.10) on the agreement level for this statement.

The size of callers' organisations was also a significant factor, since those who worked in companies with one to four employees reported the highest agreement scores on all three statements.

Respondents who said they had managed to speak to someone on their first call also registered much higher agreement scores on all three of these statements when compared to both those who were either asked to call again due to all lines being busy, and those who hung up and re-called because of waiting too long. As previously noted in this report, an association is perceptible between callers' inability to speak to someone on their first call and significant differences in callers' wider attitudes and/or perceptions about the helpline generally. One might therefore argue that not getting through at a first attempt has a detrimental knock-on effect on callers' overall perception of the service they eventually receive.

A detailed summary of the mean scores for all these significant variables is given in Appendix Table 2.3.

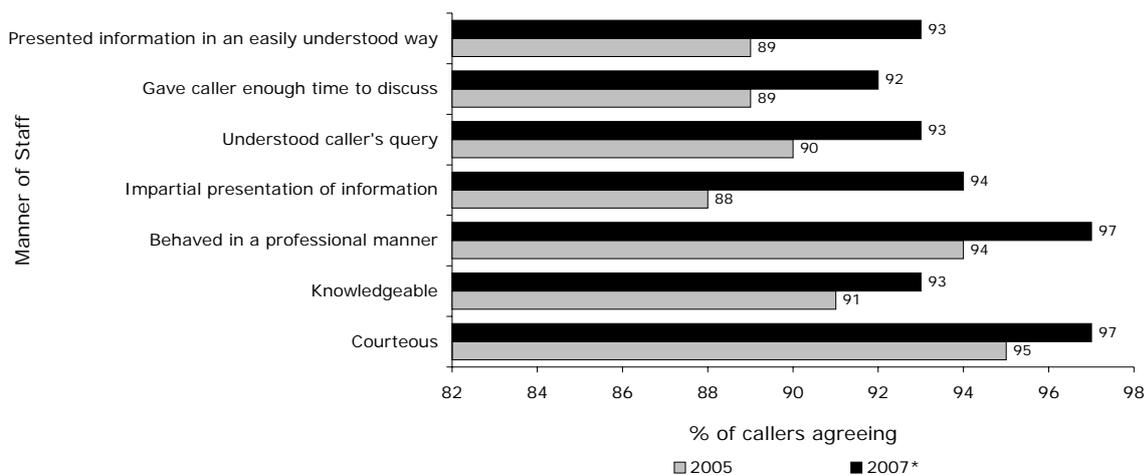
4.2 About the Acas member of staff handling their calls

Callers were also asked about the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed with a series of seven attitudinal statements (using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)). These statements were about whether Acas members of staff:

- were courteous
- were knowledgeable
- behaved in a professional manner
- presented the information in an impartial way
- understood the caller's query
- gave the caller enough time to discuss their query
- presented the information in a way the caller easily understood.

As Figure 4.3 shows, there were very high levels of agreement on all seven statements concerning the manner in which helpline staff handled calls.

Figure 4.3: Agreement rates about the Acas member of staff



*Note: The base does not include the non-responses for 2007 data.

Base for 2005 = 931, Base for 2007 = 1,802

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Overall, more than nine in ten callers either agreed or strongly agreed on all seven statements. The proportions who 'strongly agreed' consistently outweighed those who 'agreed' on all seven statements. Even the lowest agreement rate was more than 90 per cent, as 92 per cent either agreed (38 per cent) or strongly agreed (54 per cent) that the Acas member of staff gave them enough time to discuss their query. While five per cent said 'neither', only three per cent either disagreed (two per cent) or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Almost all callers (97 per cent) either agreed (35 per cent) or strongly agreed (62 per cent) that Acas advisers had been courteous, and the same proportion either agreed (36 per cent) or strongly agreed (61 per cent) that they behaved in a professional manner.

Furthermore, 93 per cent of callers either agreed (36 per cent) or strongly agreed (57 per cent) that helpline staff were knowledgeable; 94 per cent either agreed (38 per cent) or strongly agreed (56 per cent) that they presented the information in an impartial way. Ninety three per cent of callers either agreed (38 per cent) or strongly agreed (55 per cent) that advisers understood their query, while 93 per cent either agreed (38 per cent) or strongly agreed that they had presented the information in an easily understandable manner.

As can also be seen in Figure 4.3, there were notable increases on all seven statements since the last survey, with the most pronounced improvement relating to advisers' impartial presentation of information; this was up from 88 per cent in 2005 to 94 per cent in this survey. Although these increases are very encouraging, one needs to bear in mind that the inclusion of non-responses in the 2005 data may partly be responsible for exaggerating this improvement.

4.2.1 Further analysis: differences between groups of callers

As with the attitude statements about the information provided, the proportions of callers who were in agreement with these seven statements about the way in which Acas members of staff handled calls were also very high. Therefore, comparing those agreeing to those disagreeing did not produce any meaningful sub-group analysis. Instead, a series of statistical tests⁵ were again conducted to find out if there were significant differences between group of callers by looking at the variations in their mean scores.

Using the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure callers' agreement levels, the results showed average scores of no less than 4.5 for the seven statements. This indicates very high agreement rates among callers; further evidenced by the individual proportions agreeing with each of the seven statements.

First, the mean scores for these statements across the survey were:

- 'The Acas member of staff was courteous' had a mean score of 4.59
- 'They were knowledgeable' produced a mean score of 4.49
- 'They behaved in a professional manner' showed a mean score of 4.57
- 'They presented the information in an impartial way' had a mean score of 4.49
- 'They understood the caller's query' had a mean score of 4.46
- 'They gave the caller enough time to discuss their query' showed a mean score of 4.43
- 'They presented the information in a way the caller easily understood' had a mean score of 4.45.

⁵ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) – as explained in previous footnote.

The results of the sub-group analysis revealed that the agreement rates were very similar when callers were compared on the basis of gender, state of health, industrial and occupational classifications.

However, there were again significant differences between different types of caller – in this instance for five out of the seven statements⁶. For these five statements, those who called as former employees conferred consistently lower mean scores than the other types of caller. Those calling as employees, on the other hand, showed higher mean scores on these five statements.

In terms of caller age, those aged 18 to 24 registered lower mean scores than the survey average on the statement regarding the Acas member of staff presenting information in an easily understandable manner. Conversely, those aged 60 to 65 had a significantly higher agreement rate on this statement. The mean score of the other age groups were same as the survey average.

The findings showed some sub-group differences in terms of respondents' ethnicity. Although callers who classified themselves other than 'white' tended to have lower agreement scores on all attitudinal statements, this was statistically significant only for the statement concerning whether the Acas member of staff understood their query. Those in ethnic categories other than white showed lower agreement scores on this particular aspect.

The analysis of the sub-groups on the basis of religion also produced significant results on four of the seven attitudinal statements. Callers who described their religion as other than Christian or 'none' had lower agreement scores on the statements about the Acas member of staff being knowledgeable, presenting information to them in an impartial way, understanding their query and giving them enough time to discuss their query. However, there were significantly higher numbers of callers describing themselves as 'non-white' (27 per cent, as compared to the survey average of only three per cent) within the 'other religions' category. Therefore, it may be plausible that this finding has more to do with ethnicity (and possibly language) than religion *per se*.

There were also significant differences between the attitudes of those who worked in organisations with an HR specialist and those without. Callers without an HR specialist showed significantly higher mean scores on all seven statements than those with an HR specialist at their workplace.

It is perhaps not surprising that callers who said they had managed to speak to someone on their first call had much higher agreement rates on all seven of these statements, as compared to both those who were either asked to call again due to all lines being busy, and those who hung up and re-called because they were kept waiting too long. This is consistent with the earlier argument of there being a knock-on impact of not getting through at a first attempt.

A detailed summary of the mean scores for all these significant variables are given in Appendix Table 2.4.

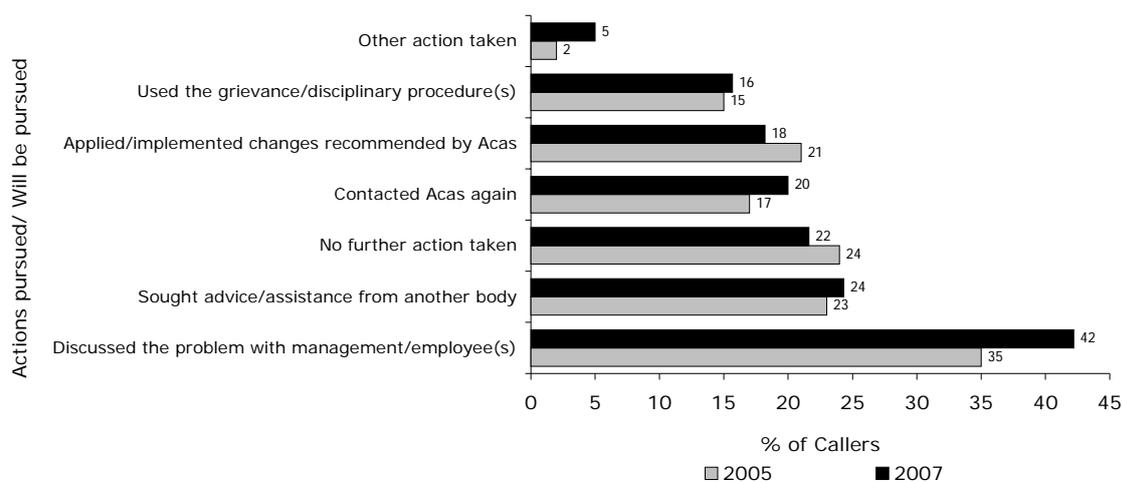
⁶ Excluding statements about the Acas member of staff being knowledgeable and presenting impartial information, which were not found to be significant.

5 FOLLOWING THE CALL TO THE ACAS HELPLINE

5.1 Further options pursued/will be pursued by callers

When asked what further options they had taken or would take following their call to the helpline, more than four in ten callers (42 per cent) reported discussing the problem with management (or their employees if they called as an employer). As evident in Figure 5.1, the proportions nominating this and other action categories stayed broadly unchanged from those reported in the previous survey.

Figure 5.1: Further options pursued/will be pursued by all*



*Note: These responses sum to more than 100% as this was a multiple response question which allows respondents to tick all that apply to them. Also, non-responses were not included in 2007 data.

Base for 2005= 931, Base for 2007 = 1,743

Source: IES Survey, 2007

There were no differences between employers and employees in terms of discussing the problem with management, although a higher proportion of those calling on behalf of an employer (50 per cent) reported pursuing this option. Callers who worked for not-for-profit or voluntary sector organisations were also likelier to indicate that they had taken/would take this action (48 per cent).

Almost a quarter of callers (24 per cent) said that they had sought or planned to seek assistance from other bodies. Those calling as employees (32 per cent) and especially those calling as former employees (51 per cent) seemed to be more likely to take this course of action. Furthermore, callers who were dissatisfied with the service provided by the helpline tended to be more likely to seek advice or assistance from other bodies (60 per cent of dissatisfied callers as compared to 31 per cent of those satisfied). Callers from not-for-profit or voluntary sectors were less likely to pursue assistance from other bodies (18 per cent), as compared to those who were either from private (26 per cent) or public (27 per cent) sector organisations.

One in five callers said that the further action they had taken/would take was to call Acas again. Those calling as former employees seemed more likely than other types of caller to do so; 28 per cent of former employees reported taking this option, as compared to 18 per cent of employers and 22 per cent of employees.

Nearly one in five callers (18 per cent) mentioned that they had applied or planned to apply changes recommended by Acas. Not surprisingly, those calling as employers and those calling on behalf of an employer were the caller types most likely to give this response (28 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

5.2 Impact of calls on employers' policies and practices

Employers in this survey were asked to indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with two statements about the effect calls had had on policies and practices. They were asked to use a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for this question.

5.2.1 Updating/improving existing policies

The first statement was about whether employers' calls had motivated them to update or improve existing policies at their workplace. Nearly half (48 per cent) of employers either agreed (32 per cent) or strongly agreed (16 per cent) that their call to the Acas helpline had motivated them to make such a change. More than four in ten (42 per cent) selected the middle point on the agreement scale (i.e. 'neither agree nor disagree'). Only one in ten either disagreed (eight per cent) or strongly disagreed (two per cent) that the information provided had motivated them to update/improve existing policies. In the 2005 survey, the proportion of employers who either agreed or strongly agreed had been slightly higher at 53 per cent.

Because only a small number of employers disagreed with this first statement, the cross-tabulations for the sub-group analysis failed to produce any meaningful sub-group comparisons. A series of statistical tests⁷ were therefore conducted to examine if there were any significant differences between the mean scores of the sub-groups of this survey. The results showed no significant differences for most of the sub-groups. However, whether or not employers had an HR specialist at their workplace *was* a significant factor for the 'motivational impact' of their call. Compared to the mean score of 3.53 across the survey, employers without an HR specialist were significantly more likely, with a mean score of 3.64, to agree that their call had motivated them to improve existing policies at their workplace. Employers who had an HR specialist were less likely to be motivated by the information to make such changes (mean score of 3.38).

The other determinant factor was whether employers managed to speak to someone on their first call. Employers who reported getting through immediately were significantly more likely (mean score of 3.65) to report that their call had motivated them to update or improve existing policies at their workplace. Those who said they were asked to call back were less likely (with a mean score of 3.33) to be motivated to do so, whilst employers who hung up because of waiting too long were the least likely group (with a mean score of 2.62) to be motivated in this way. It should be

⁷ ANOVAs (see footnote 4 for explanation).

borne in mind that, although significant, the numbers in this category (those who hung up) were rather small to draw strong conclusions.

5.2.2 Implementing new policies

The second statement was about whether employers' calls had motivated them to implement a new policy or policies at their workplace. More than two in five (45 per cent) either agreed (30 per cent) or strongly agreed (15 per cent) that they were motivated to implement a new policy as a result of the information provided to them by the helpline. Almost as many (44 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed that their call had this impact on them, while 11 per cent of employers either disagreed (nine per cent) or strongly disagreed (only two per cent) with this statement.

Due to similar restrictions regarding the small numbers within the 'disagreed' responses, the results of the cross-tabulations again showed no meaningful differences. Statistical tests⁸ were therefore used to identify significant differences between the mean scores of the sub-groups. The results were very similar to the findings for the first statement as most of the sub-group comparisons were not significant. Again, the exceptions were the two significant factors discussed above. Compared to the mean score of 3.47 across the survey, employers without an HR specialist were significantly more likely, with a mean score of 3.58, to be motivated by the information given to implement new policies at their workplace. Those with an HR specialist, on the other hand, were less likely (with a mean score of 3.33) to be motivated in this way by their call to the helpline.

Callers' (in)ability to get through to the helpline was also a significant determinant for this statement. The findings showed that employers who got through immediately were significantly more likely to agree (mean score of 3.60) than those who were asked to call back (with a mean score of 3.27). The lowest mean score (2.62) was reported by callers who had hung up to re-call later because they had been kept waiting too long. As mentioned above, however, caution should be exercised given that the numbers in this category (those who hung up) are too small to draw strong conclusions.

5.3 Impact of helpline on Employment Tribunal claim decision-making for:

5.3.1 Employees

Respondents who called the helpline as employees were asked whether they had been considering making a claim to the Employment Tribunal (ET) before calling the Acas helpline. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of all current as well as former employees confirmed that they had indeed been considering making a claim. Although this constitutes a slight decline since the 2005 survey, when 26 per cent reported pre-call consideration of an ET claim, the difference is too small for comment. Meanwhile, of the remainder, sixty-four per cent of employees (current and former) had not been considering an ET claim prior to calling, while 13 per cent did not know.

⁸ ANOVAs (see footnote 4 for explanation).

The data was further analysed to determine whether different sub-groups of employees were more likely than others to have considered making an ET claim before calling the helpline. Table 5.1 (overleaf) shows the results of the sub-group analysis that produced significant differences.

Table 5.1: Whether employees considered making an ET claim before their call to the helpline* (%)

		Yes	No	Don't know	Base (100%)
All employees		23	64	13	806
Calling as	Current employees	19	67	14	698
	Former employees	51	41	8	104
Gender	Male	29	57	14	260
	Female	20	67	13	540
SIC	Manufacturing	24	54	22	91
	Construction	28	48	24	46
	Distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants	26	62	12	192
	Transport, storage and communication	19	71	10	84
	Banking, finance, insurance, etc.	18	67	15	76
	Public admin, education and health	21	71	8	150
	Other services	23	64	13	119

* Non-responses are not included in the base.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

As can be seen in Table 5.1, as compared to current employees, former employees were significantly more likely to have considered making a claim prior to calling the helpline (51 per cent, compared to 19 per cent). There was also a significant gender difference as the results showed that men were likelier than women to have considered making an ET claim before their call (29 per cent of men, as compared to 20 per cent of women). In terms of the industrial sector categories in the survey, those who worked in construction and those in distribution, retail and hotels were the most likely groups to have considered this action (28 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively). Employees in banking, finance and insurance and those in transport storage and communication, on the other hand, were less likely to have done so (18 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively).

Employees were also asked about the action they had taken following their call to the helpline. In other words, they were asked whether they had gone on to actually make an ET claim or had decided against making such a claim. In all, 13 per cent reported making a claim while 14 per cent decided against it. For 73 per cent of employees, the option of an ET claim was not applicable in their case. This proportion of 73 per cent is broadly consistent with the overall proportion of employees (77 per cent) either answering 'no' (64 per cent) or 'don't know' (13 per cent) to the earlier question about considering an ET claim before calling.

The results of the subgroup analysis showed some significant differences in employees' post-call actions. As Table 5.2 shows, employees who had considered making an ET claim before their call were significantly more likely to go on to make such a claim than those who had not considered this option. Forty-one per cent of those who had considered this option went on to make an ET claim while only four per cent of employees who had not previously considered this option (mostly due to this action not being applicable to their case) went on to make a claim. More than one-third (36 per cent) who had considered such an action decided against it after their call to the helpline.

Table 5.2: Whether or not employees went on to make an ET claim after their call* (%)

		Made a claim	Decided against making a claim	N/A	Base (100%)
All employees		13	14	73	806
Employees	Considering claim before call	41	36	23	100
	Not considering before call	4	5	91	106
	Didn't know	10	20	70	556
Calling as	Current employees	10	13	77	665
	Former employees	38	18	44	97

* Non-responses are not included in the base.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Table 5.2 also shows that former employees were significantly more likely to go on to make a claim than current employees (38 per cent as compared to only 10 per cent). However, more than three quarters of current employees (77 per cent) stated that this action was not applicable to their case.

Although this question was asked in the 2005 survey, the response of 'neither of these' was given to respondents as the third option. This option was replaced with the 'not applicable' response for clarity in 2007. Consequently, the findings on this question are not directly comparable to those of the last survey.

In order to establish the link between the two questions discussed above, a new question was introduced in this year's survey asking employees to indicate how important their call to the Acas helpline had been in helping them reach their ET claim decision. The results showed that 70 per cent found their call to be either very important (39 per cent) or quite important (31 per cent). Only eight per cent of employees said that their call was not very important (six per cent) or not at all important in their decision. For 22 per cent of the cases this was either not applicable (21 per cent) or they did not know.

Table 5.3 shows the results of further analysis examining how influential employees rated their call to the helpline in terms of ET claim decision-making. This table compares employees who were considering making an ET claim before calling the helpline to those who went on to take either the action of making a claim *or* decided against making such a claim.

Table 5.3: Perceived influence of call to the Acas helpline in helping employees reach their ET claim decisions* (%)

	Call perceived to be 'very' or 'quite' important	Call perceived to be 'not very' or 'not at all' important	N/A	BASE
All employees considering an ET claim before call	70	8	22	186
Those considering a claim AND deciding to make such a claim after call	84	14	2	69
Those considering a claim AND deciding against such a claim after call	90	8	2	62

* Non-responses are not included in the base.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

As can be seen in Table 5.3, of those employees already considering making an ET claim prior to calling the helpline, proportionately more indicated that their call had been important in helping them *decide against making a claim* (90 per cent) than said their call had been important in helping them *decide to make a claim* (84 per cent). However, due to very small numbers, especially in the 'calls not important' category, this finding was not found to be statistically significant.

Based on the numbers from this survey and the number of calls monitored systematically during a 12-month period by Acas' own management information systems (between February 2006 and January 2007)⁹, the helpline's impact on ET claim avoidance was also calculated. The figures showed that, during this period, approximately 16,000 prospective claimants decided against pursuing an ET claim on the strength of the information provided by the Acas helpline. This suggests that the

⁹ Please see Appendix 3 for a detailed explanation of the impact calculation.

service often has a significant influence on employees' decision-making as regards ET claims.

5.3.2 Employers

Respondents who called the helpline as employers were asked to indicate whether their call was in response to concerns that one or more of their employees had been considering making an ET claim. Only eleven per cent of employers said that this was the case. The majority of employers (86 per cent) gave a 'no' response to this question and a small proportion (three per cent) did not know.

Employers who said that they had called the helpline in response to concerns over their employee(s) considering making a claim were then asked whether the employee(s) had actually gone on to make an ET claim after this call. Just over one in five (21 per cent) confirmed that their employee(s) had gone on to make an ET claim, while almost half (46 per cent) reported that their employee(s) had decided against making a claim. One-third gave a 'don't know' response to this question.

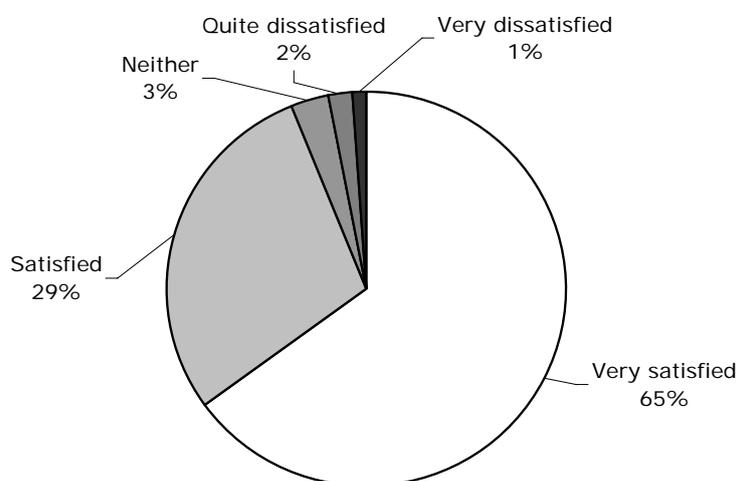
In all, employers do not tend to call the helpline regarding ET claims; only a small proportion of employers (11 per cent) in this survey had called the helpline in response to concerns that one or more of their employees had been considering making a claim. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in nearly half of these cases employers reported that, following their call to the Acas helpline, the employee(s) at issue went on to drop the claim. When interpreting this finding, one needs to bear in mind that this question asked managers to speak on behalf of their employees when in fact they might not be in a position to do so accurately.

6 SATISFACTION WITH THE HELPLINE

6.1 Overall satisfaction

Callers were asked, considering everything, how satisfied they were with the service they had received from the Acas helpline. They were asked to use a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) through to 5 (very satisfied) to indicate their overall satisfaction. A very high proportion of callers (94 per cent) said that they were either satisfied (29 per cent) or very satisfied (65 per cent). Three per cent said 'neither', two per cent said they were quite dissatisfied and only one per cent reported being very dissatisfied with the service. The same level of overall satisfaction (94 per cent) was also reported in the 2005 survey.

Figure 6.1: Overall satisfaction scores



BASE = 1,806 (Note: non-responses are not included in the base.)

Source: IES Survey, 2007

As already discussed under the respondents' attitudes section (Section 4), satisfaction responses were so disproportionately in one direction – with very high satisfaction levels – that comparing proportions of satisfied callers to those dissatisfied did not produce any meaningful sub-group analysis. Instead, a series of statistical tests¹⁰ were conducted to establish whether there were significant differences in mean satisfaction scores between the groups in the survey. As expected, the survey average score for overall satisfaction was very high, with 4.54. On a five-point scale where the score of 3.0 is considered to be the middle point, mean scores of 4.0 and over can be considered to be 'very positive' or 'very satisfied'.

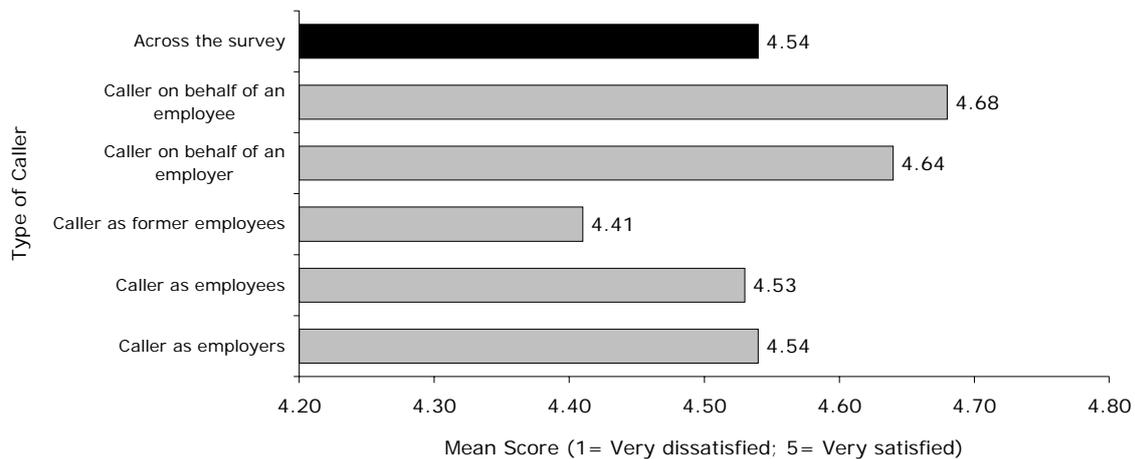
The results of the sub-group analysis showed some significant differences. Although satisfaction levels were very high on the whole, this was even higher, with a mean score of 4.68, for those calling on behalf of an employee. Those calling as former employees had the lowest mean score with 4.41. However, this very possibly has

¹⁰ ANOVAs (see footnote 4 for explanation).

more to do with their dissatisfaction at having lost their jobs than with the helpline service they subsequently received.

Figure 6.2 presents the variations in mean scores for the five different types of caller.

Figure 6.2: Overall satisfaction with the helpline



Base= 1,806

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Note: non-responses are not included in the base.

There were also significant differences on the basis of callers' ethnicity and religion. Callers who classified themselves other than 'white' had lower satisfaction scores (with a mean score of 4.39) than those who were in the 'white' category. Those who had a religion other than Christian had the lowest mean score (4.30).

Callers who worked in organisations with one to four employees registered the highest satisfaction score (with a mean score of 4.64) while those in larger organisations, with more than 500 employees, had the lowest mean score (4.38).

Consistent with other findings regarding the attitudinal statements discussed above, callers who worked in organisations without an HR specialist showed higher satisfaction scores – with a mean score of 4.63 – than those with such a specialist (4.46).

Interestingly, the subject area of the calls also produced some significant differences. Callers ringing about family friendly policies had the highest satisfaction score (4.81) while those calling about diversity and discrimination issues gave the lowest satisfaction level with a mean score of 4.22.

Not surprisingly, callers' (in)ability to speak to someone on their first call to the Acas helpline impacted on their overall satisfaction scores. Those reporting having got through immediately were the most satisfied, with a mean score of 4.70. Those who hung up because of waiting too long on their earlier attempts were the least satisfied, with a mean score of 3.13. However, although significant, small numbers in this group (those who hung up) mean that this result should be treated with caution.

(Callers who were asked to call back due to all lines being busy also had lower satisfaction scores with 4.35).

A detailed summary of the mean scores for all these significant variables are given in Appendix Table 2.5.

6.2 Prospective re-use of the Acas helpline

When asked if they would use the Acas helpline again if they had other enquires relating to employment issues, almost all callers (97 per cent) confirmed that they would do so. This compares to 96 per cent found in the 2005 survey. Only very few callers said that they would not call the helpline again (one per cent) and a further two per cent gave a 'don't know' response to this question¹¹.

The results showed consistently high proportions stating that they would use the service again across all groups in the survey. Furthermore, when caller type was aggregated into three categories (i.e. employers/employees/third parties), the proportion of third party callers who reported that they would use the helpline again was even higher, at 99 per cent – as compared to 95 per cent of current and former employees. Meanwhile, 98 per cent of employers indicated that they would use the service again.

All callers (100 per cent) who were from organisations with one to four employees said that they would use the service again, as compared to 92 per cent of those with more than 500 employees. Elsewhere, 98 per cent of callers without an HR specialist reported that they would use the service again, whereas 95 per cent of those with an HR specialist said the same.

6.3 Likelihood that callers will recommend the helpline to friends and work colleagues

Callers were also asked how likely they were to recommend the Acas helpline to a friend or work colleague; by using a five point scale, which ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). Consistent with other survey findings on satisfaction, a very high proportion of callers (95 per cent) reported that they were either very likely (78 per cent) or likely (17 per cent) to recommend the helpline to a friend or colleague. Only one per cent said that they were either unlikely or very unlikely to recommend the service.

The results of the significance testing¹² showed that the survey average score for recommendation was very high with 4.72.

When further sub-group analyses were conducted, the results showed that there were significant differences in terms of callers' age as regards likelihood of

¹¹ For the purpose of further comparisons, the 'no' and 'don't know' responses were recoded into the same category.

¹² Due to similar restrictions discussed before with other attitudinal responses, comparing proportions of responses on the five-point scale failed to produce any meaningful sub-group analysis. Instead, a series of ANOVAs were conducted to find out if there were significant differences in respondents' mean scores.

recommendation. Younger callers (those aged 18 to 24) as well as older callers (aged over 65) were significantly less likely on average to say they would recommend the service (mean scores of 4.55 and 4.41 respectively). Those aged 60 to 65 had the highest mean score with 4.87, while the other age groups were within the range of survey average.

Respondents' work status also showed some significant differences, with callers who worked for an agency or as a temp registering lower mean scores (4.33). Those who were self-employed had a mean score of 4.66 and part-time workers had the highest score with 4.78. However, one needs to take into account the small numbers of agency/temp workers in the sample. It is also important to note that this finding on employment status may possibly have more to do with these callers' dissatisfaction regarding their lower level of employment rights (due to their work status) rather than with the service provided to them by the helpline.

Consistent with other findings across the report, callers from large organisations (with more than 500 employees) had lower mean scores, with 4.55, while those from organisations with one to four employees recorded a mean score of 4.76. This is perhaps not surprising, given that large organisations most likely to have an HR function and to have formal policies and procedures in place. The advice provided to callers from large organisations might therefore not have added significantly to what they possibly already knew. However, the same is not true of small organisations, whose callers are likelier to have been actively seeking advice about such procedures. As such, differences in the way small and large organisations function may in fact explain this finding.

There were also differences in terms of callers' industrial sector. Those in the manufacturing sector registered lower mean scores with 4.66, whereas callers in transport and communication had the highest mean score with 4.80.

As expected, callers who managed to speak to someone on their first call to the helpline registered the highest mean score, with 4.80, whereas those who had hung up to re-call later due to being kept waiting too long reported the lowest mean score (3.94). However, the numbers in this category are too small for strong conclusions to be drawn. Those who were asked to call back had a mean score of 4.62, which was lower than the mean score for those who got through immediately. Again, this finding is consistent with the earlier idea of there being a 'knock-on' attitudinal effect of not getting through to the helpline first time.

A detailed summary of the mean scores for all these significant variables are given in Appendix Table 2.6.

7 ADDITIONAL CALLER INFORMATION

7.1 Access to internet

Callers in this survey were asked whether or not they had internet access at and/or outside of work. Here, 61 per cent of callers reported having access to the internet at work, while 62 per cent had internet access outside of work. Just over one in ten (12 per cent) callers reported having no access at all. In all, almost nine in ten (87 per cent) callers had internet access *either* at work and/or outside of work, i.e. some form of internet access. Lastly, just over one-third of callers (34 per cent) reported having access to internet *both* at work and outside of work.

The results of the sub-group analysis showed some significant differences in callers' access to internet:

- Those calling on behalf of employers were the most likely group to have internet access either at work or outside of work, with 98 per cent as compared to 67 per cent of former employees. Ninety-six per cent of employers had equivalent internet access.
- In terms of industrial sector, callers in banking, finance and insurance were the most likely groups to have internet access either at or outside of work (95 per cent). Those in distribution, hotels and restaurants were the least likely group to have access either at or outside of work (81 per cent).
- Callers aged 25 to 34 were most likely to have some form of internet access (95 per cent).
- Managers and professionals were more likely to have access either at or outside of work (94 per cent). Callers in operative and unskilled jobs were the least likely occupational group to have internet access, as only 55 per cent had access either at work or outside of work.
- Callers in larger organisations were much more likely to have some form of internet access; 95 per cent of those who worked in organisations with more than 100 employees as compared to 83 per cent of those with one to four employees.
- Those working in organisations with an HR specialist were more likely (91 per cent) to have internet access (at work and/or outside), as compared to 88 per cent of those without such a specialist.

7.2 Pre-call use of internet

Callers who confirmed having internet access were subsequently asked if they had tried to find the answer to their enquiry on the Acas website (www.acas.org.uk) before calling the helpline. Just over half of callers with internet access (51 per cent) stated that they had tried the website beforehand, while 49 per cent said they had not. In the 2005 survey, 44 per cent of callers confirmed having previously tried to find the answer on the website, so there seems to have been a notable increase in pre-call website usage. The results showed some significant differences between sub-groups:

- Those calling on behalf of an employer were most likely to have tried to find the answer to their enquiry on the Acas website (58 per cent) whilst those calling on behalf of an employee were least likely (44 per cent). Fifty-two per cent of employers reported trying to find an answer on the website before their call.
- Callers aged 25 to 34 were the most likely age group to have tried the website before their call to the helpline (62 per cent), followed by those aged 18 to 24 with 55 per cent. Callers aged 60 and over were less likely to have tried the website before calling the helpline (32 per cent of those aged 60 to 65, and 13 per cent of those aged over 65).
- Callers working as full-time employees were most likely (55 per cent) and those who were self-employed least likely (39 per cent) to have tried to find the answer to their enquiry on the website.
- Managers and professionals were most likely (54 per cent) and callers in services and sales least likely (40 per cent) to have tried the website.
- Callers who worked in larger organisations were most likely to have tried the website before calling; 64 per cent of those working in organisations with more than 500 employees reported having done so, while 39 per cent of those from organisations with one to four employees said the same.
- Fifty-six per cent of callers who had an HR specialist at their workplace reported trying to find an answer on the website, whilst 48 per cent of those without such a specialist reported trying.
- Those who reported having internet access at work were more likely (56 per cent) than those without this access (38 per cent) to report that they had tried to find answer to their enquiry on the website before calling. No significant differences were found between callers with internet access *either* at work or outside of work.

7.3 Prospective future use of various Acas sources of information

Callers in this survey were asked to indicate how likely they were to use the following sources of information on employment issues in the future:

- The Acas website (www.acas.org.uk)
- Acas publications

To enable meaningful comparisons between sub-groups, callers who answered 'very' or 'quite' likely to use were recoded as 'likely users'. Similarly, those answering 'not very' or 'not at all' likely were recoded as 'unlikely users'. Callers who responded with a 'don't know' answer were included with 'unlikely users' as the numbers in this category were too small (especially for the website source) to stand as a separate response.

7.3.1 *The Acas website*

When asked how likely it was for callers to use the Acas website¹³ as a source of information on employment issues in the future, over eight in ten respondents (85 per cent) said that it was either very likely (50 per cent) or quite likely (35 per cent). Just over one in ten callers (11 per cent) said it was not very likely and three per cent said it was not at all likely that they would use the Acas website in the future. Two per cent gave a 'don't know' answer to this question.

When 'likely users' were compared to 'unlikely users', the results showed the following significant differences between groups:

- In terms of caller status, those calling on behalf of an employer were most likely to be users of the website (91 per cent) while those calling as a former employee (83 per cent) and those calling on behalf of an employee (80 per cent) were less likely to be users; 84 per cent of those calling as an employer and the same proportion of those calling as an employee were 'likely users'.
- Callers aged 25 to 34 were the most likely users (89 per cent) while those aged over 65 were the least likely users (60 per cent).
- Full-time employees were more likely (88 per cent) to be users of the website than self-employed callers (75 per cent).
- Callers working in organisations with 100 to 499 employees were more likely (91 per cent) than those with one to four employees (79 per cent) to be future users of the website.

7.3.2 *Acas publications*

Respondents were also asked how likely it was that they would use Acas publications as future sources of information on employment issues. Over half of callers (56 per cent) said that it was either very likely (27 per cent) or quite likely (29 per cent) that they would use the publications. These proportions seem much lower than those given for the website. However, it should be noted here that there has in recent years been a gradual reduction in the volume of Acas publications. This move towards using the website rather than publications was mentioned in all four discussion groups when the opinion-seeking exercises took place. Therefore, these proportions seem to represent the declining volume of publications handled by Acas.

More than a quarter (34 per cent) of callers said it was either not very likely (25 per cent) or not at all likely (nine per cent) that they would use the Acas publications in the future. Almost one in ten said they did not know.

The results showed the following significant differences between groups when 'likely users' were compared to 'unlikely users':

- Those calling on behalf of an employer (73 per cent) and those calling as an employer (64 per cent) were more likely to report that they would use Acas publications in the future. Only 38 per cent of those calling as former employees

¹³ For the use of the Acas website, analysis was restricted to only those who had reported having access to internet either at work or outside of work.

and 45 per cent of current employees reported that they were likely to use the publications.

- More women (58 per cent) than men (52 per cent) were likely future users of Acas publications.
- Callers working in public administration, education and health sectors were more likely than those working in distribution, hotels and restaurants to be 'likely users' of Acas publications (63 per cent and 48 per cent respectively).
- More managers and professionals (62 per cent) than those in operatives and unskilled occupations (43 per cent) were likely users of the Acas publications.
- Those who work in larger organisations were more likely than those in organisations with less than ten employees to be future users of publications; 63 per cent of those with over 500 employees as compared to 49 per cent of those with five to nine employees reported being likely users of the Acas publications.
- Sixty-two per cent of callers from organisations with an HR specialist reported being likely users, whereas 54 per cent of those without such a specialist said the same.

8 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

A final question gave respondents the option of writing any additional comments that they might have had about the helpline. In all, one in four respondents chose to give comments. In almost half of these comments, callers either wrote about the subject of their call to the helpline, or expressed their frustration with certain policies or the way their employers (in the cases of employees) had been treating them. In a small proportion of cases (less than five per cent of all comments), callers expressed strong disagreement with some of the survey questions on personal details, especially as regards the question on 'sexuality'. In a similarly small number of cases, callers also requested advice and information on their queries.

Just over half of all additional comments provided by callers included feedback about the Acas helpline and how they felt the helpline advisers had dealt with their enquiries. Analysis of these comments shows some very consistent and positive feedback given by callers. In over a third of the comments containing feedback, callers felt that the Acas helpline provided an excellent service. The advice they received was said to have been extremely helpful and the information given was perceived as having been very informative, well-informed and of significant use to callers. Many people felt that Acas restored their self-confidence and peace of mind concerning their issues and that the service provided was helpful both to employers and employees. Additionally, many of those who completed the survey reported having used Acas throughout their employment history as they found its services to be so invaluable. The quotations given below summarise the views held by callers:

"I have been using the Acas helpline for a number of years now, and have always found the staff helpful, knowledgeable and very efficient. I have never been dissatisfied with anything that they have done for me."

"The Acas helpline is brilliant. The advisers are more than helpful and will ensure you fully understand the answer to your query before ending the call. They direct you to other sources if they are unable to help with your query. I recommend them to everyone. Thank you!"

"I have always been very happy with the information and help given. In fact, I don't think I could do my job without it."

Negative feedback concerning Acas was limited, less than one in ten of all additional comments containing less positive feedback – however there was a lot of consistency in comments concerning staff abruptness and (at times) unfriendliness. In half of these cases, callers also were confused due to the fact that each time they called Acas the response they received was slightly different and that sometimes it had been hard to receive a straight answer. The quotations given below provide good examples in terms of echoing callers' disappointment on these aspects:

"I found the adviser very abrupt on the call, with a 'matter of fact' attitude, not listening to my details in full, without taking all the relevant information from me, therefore misadvising me."

"Although the person I spoke to at Acas the last time was most helpful and informative, this has not always been my experience. The two times I called prior to this, I received conflicting information and hence I called a third time to clarify by speaking to a different Acas adviser. I understand the area is not cut and dry but I felt the advisers were not confident in their response."

The waiting time on the phone deterred some callers from having a positive experience. There were consistent complaints about the length of time it took them to speak with someone.

Furthermore, in a small number of cases (around two per cent of all comments), callers noted that the Acas website was very unhelpful and was severely lacking information, and that Acas should send out more publications (providing that these should also be available on-line) to both employers and employees which would inform them about their particular rights in order that everyone can be kept up-to-date. Overall, however, the positives were significantly more substantial in most responses.

9 CONCLUSIONS

The findings clearly indicate that the Acas helpline continues to be valued by employers, employees (both current and former) and third-party callers.

The results of the analysis concerning the manner in which helpline advisers handled callers' enquiries showed very high agreement rates indeed – 97 per cent of respondents confirming that helpline staff had been courteous and professional. Furthermore, very high proportions of callers consistently agreed that advisers: presented information in an impartial way (94 per cent); were knowledgeable; understood their queries; and presented information in a way they could easily understand (93 per cent on all three aspects). Ninety-two per cent also agreed that staff had given them sufficient time to discuss their query. Compared to the proportions reported in the 2005 survey, these are significant increases.

The levels of agreement amongst respondents were consistently high on all seven statements concerning the way in which Acas staff handled their calls. Although there were some generalised variations between sub-groups, some of the differences were perhaps due to the individual needs of particular groups within this survey. For example, younger callers (aged 18 to 24) reported lower average scores on the statement about Acas staff presenting the information in a way they easily understood. Individuals within this age group are often reported to be 'less aware' of issues regarding employment in general and also about their individual rights. It may therefore be possible that lower average scores from this age group are indicative of their awareness levels generally, rather than of the ability of the Acas helpline staff to present the information.

Furthermore, compared to callers who classified themselves as 'white', respondents who were other than white had significantly lower average scores on the statement about the Acas member of staff understanding their query in full. This finding may be related to the language-barrier issues that were mentioned by helpline staff in discussion groups during the opinion-seeking exercise sessions.

The findings of the survey showed consistently high levels of caller agreement (and also higher than the proportions reported in 2005) regarding the information provided to respondents by the helpline: Nine in ten callers found it valuable; almost as many (88 per cent) agreed that the information provided answered their enquiry in full; and 87 per cent said it helped them decide what to do next.

Although agreement levels on all three statements were very high across the survey on the whole, they were even higher for the following groups of respondents:

- those calling on behalf of third parties
- callers without an HR specialist in their workplace
- respondents in very small organisations (with one to four employees)
- those from public administration, education and health sectors (significantly higher average scores as regards the information provided having helped them decide what to do next)
- callers who managed to speak to someone at a first attempt.

Interestingly, callers who described their religion as other than 'Christian' or 'none' recorded lower average scores with reference to the information provided having answered their enquiry in full. It may be possible – and was advanced by some of the helpline staff attending opinion-seeking exercises – that these callers' queries are sometimes too specific¹⁴ to be *fully* addressed by the information provided.

Taken all together, the most satisfied groups of callers within this survey seem to be those without an HR specialist at their workplace and respondents who work in very small organisations (with one to four employees). These two groups registered consistently higher satisfaction levels with almost all aspects of their call. The link between these two groups is that smaller organisations are less likely to have an HR/personnel specialist. Here, the findings seem to indicate that the Acas helpline may be compensating for the lack of an HR function in these very small workplaces, and therefore callers from these organisations find the helpline particularly valuable.

The impact of the Acas helpline on employers' policies and practices is also of key importance here. Nearly half of all employers reported that their call to the helpline had motivated them to update or improve existing policies. Consistent with earlier findings, this impact was significantly higher for callers without an HR specialist at their workplace. It should also be noted that when employers managed to speak to someone on their first attempt, they were more likely to update their policies following Acas advice than were those who had to call more than once.

More than two in five employers reported that their call to the helpline had motivated them to implement *new* policies at their workplace. Employers without a workplace HR specialist and those speaking to someone at a first attempt were again the most likely to make such changes.

Almost a quarter of employees in the survey said that they had been considering making a claim to the Employment Tribunal before calling the helpline. Former employees, men and respondents in the construction, distribution, retail and hotels sectors were significantly more likely to have considered this action. In the event, just over one in ten employees (13 per cent) subsequently reported having actually gone on to make an ET claim, with 14 per cent eventually deciding against this action. For more than two thirds of employees, calling the helpline was said to have been an influential factor in helping them reach their ET claim decision. Moreover, of those employees already considering making an ET claim prior to calling the helpline, proportionately more indicated that their call had been important in helping them *decide against making a claim* (90 per cent) than said their call had been important in helping them *decide to make a claim* (84 per cent).

When the Acas helpline's impact on ET claim avoidance was calculated – based both on the numbers from this survey and the number of calls monitored systematically during a 12-month period by Acas' own management information systems¹⁵ – the

¹⁴ The analysis of subject areas of calls by religion showed that, as compared to those who described their religion as 'Christian' or 'none', callers in the 'other religions' category were more likely to call about maternity, paternity and adoption (26 per cent, as compared to 13 or 12 per cent) and family friendly policies (8 per cent, as compared to 4 or 3 per cent). Although notable, due to very small numbers, these findings were not statistically significant.

¹⁵ See Appendix 3 for a detailed explanation of the impact calculation.

figures showed that approximately 16,000 prospective claimants decided against pursuing an ET claim on the strength of the information provided by the helpline. Overall, the findings suggest that the service often has significant influence on employees' decision-making as regards ET claims.

All findings taken into consideration, callers' (in)ability to speak to someone on their first call to the helpline seems to be a determinant factor in shaping their wider attitudes towards the service. Callers who said they had managed to get through at a first attempt reported consistently more positive views across the full spectrum of satisfaction and attitudinal questions. Similarly, inability to get through immediately has a significant detrimental knock-on effect on callers' overall satisfaction and on the likelihood of their recommending the service to friends or work colleagues. Therefore, in order for future surveys to report higher levels of satisfaction in general and better 'motivational impact' on employers in particular, Acas might consider improving the length of time it takes callers to speak to an adviser at a first attempt.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Sample collection

Since calls to the Acas helpline are confidential and callers are not normally asked for their name or any other personal details, no sampling frame of helpline users exists. Therefore, as in previous surveys, it was necessary for the helpline staff to collect caller details to provide the sampling frame by office.

The sampling frame was built at all offices over a five-day period between 22nd and 26th January (two days for each office, overlapping). During this period, the helpline staff asked all callers if they would like to take part in the survey. Where they agreed, callers' contact details were recorded on log-sheets used for this exercise. The helpline staff were given the option of using electronic or paper versions of the log-sheet. The sampling methodology for this survey was kept as similar to the previous survey as possible, in keeping with the longitudinal aspect of the data analysis.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that further simplifications to the log-sheets used for this exercise would make the sampling process much easier for staff. It was also agreed that the helpline staff should have more flexibility as regards when to ask callers the question about survey participation. They were given a standardised script to use for the calls that could be described as 'straight forward' or 'standard'. However, the final decision was left to them in terms of how and when they would approach callers with the question about taking part in this survey. Advisers felt that it was not always appropriate to ask callers about the survey prior to their query being dealt with. Some helpline staff who attended the opinion-seeking exercises pointed out that they very much appreciated having this flexibility, although they seemed to differ in their ways of approaching callers with the question about the survey participation.

The recognition of the crucial role the helpline staff play for the success of this user satisfaction survey should also be noted here. Their hard work for this extra task was rightly acknowledged at the start of the sample collection. When the survey was closed and the initial findings were available, the helpline staff were also invited to attend one of the four 'opinion-seeking exercises'. These had the purpose both of debriefing staff, and canvassing their opinion on initial findings. It was envisaged that such exercises would lend credence to the evaluation, helpline staff being best placed to comment on the representativeness of the data. These opinion-seeking sessions were held in four different locations (London, Newcastle, Manchester and Bristol) in order to accommodate the nearest three offices to one of these four locations. The group discussions were well received and proved to be fruitful, and the staff were happy to be involved in the whole process from beginning to end.

It is also important to note that, during the sampling-frame building period, the discrepancy between the total number of calls *logged* (5898 calls) and those that were *actually answered* (6725 calls) was down to 12 per cent, from 25 per cent in the previous survey. This substantial 'shortfall' reduction is indicative of higher levels of commitment from the helpline staff to the sampling-frame building process.

Response rates

In total, 5,898 calls were logged by all 12 helpline offices in the two days each built the sampling frame. These numbers were very similar to the numbers obtained in the

previous survey (5,981 calls). Of these calls, 3,979 were coded as 'agreed to take part' on the log-sheets. However, in seven of the cases, the wrong code was used and therefore there were no corresponding addressee details. As a result, 3,972 potential participants were sent questionnaires. Appendix Table 1.1 shows the proportions of those who agreed and the other response categories from the log-sheets.

It is important to mention here that *proportionate sampling*, which was used in the 2004 and 2005 helpline surveys, was not used in this year's survey. Given the fact that a significant proportion of calls received by each local office have in fact been re-directed from other offices that are busy, sampling non-proportionately was not considered to be a problem in terms of representation of all the offices within the sample frame (please also refer to the 'weighting' section, below, for further explanation). The very nature of re-direction indicated that the perceived need for proportionate sampling was not particularly justified. Therefore, all willing participants were included in the sample of this survey.

Appendix Table 1.1: Sampling outcomes

	Number	%
Total number of calls logged	5,898	100
1. Agreed to take part	3,979	67.5
2. Refused	733	12.4
3. Already in sample	371	6.3
4. No opportunity to ask/hung up	435	7.4
5. Didn't ask	373	6.3
The 'agreed' code used inaccurately	7	0.1
A code other than 1 to 5 used	7	0.1
Total number sent out	3,972	67
Number of valid returns	1,822	46
Postal office/blank returns	167	4

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Overall, just over two-thirds of all callers agreed to participate in the survey (67 per cent). This is a slightly higher proportion than that of the previous survey (64 per cent in 2005). Of the 3,972 questionnaires that were mailed out, a total of 1,822 valid returns were received, in addition to 167 (four per cent) non-usable returns. This gives a 46 per cent response rate from the valid returns, which is slightly lower than the response rate of 51 per cent obtained in the 2005 survey. Considering the reported decline rates in responses to public surveys generally in the last couple of years, 46 per cent is still a respectable rate for a public survey of this kind.

The covering page of the questionnaire sent out to respondents offered an on-line link to the questionnaire, in case respondents wanted to complete the questionnaire on-line. Only 149 respondents (eight per cent) took up the option of on-line completion. There was a significant age effect in terms of whether or not respondents chose the on-line option. Those aged 18 to 24 (12 per cent) and those aged 25 to 34 (11 per cent) were more likely to complete the survey on-line, whilst those aged 60

to 65 (two per cent) were least likely to choose the on-line option. Not surprisingly, respondents who had access to the internet either at work or outside of work were also significantly more likely than those without access to choose the on-line option. Eleven per cent of those with access to the internet both at work and outside of work completed the survey on-line.

Weighting

As explained above, the sample for this survey was constructed by logging the contact details of willing participants calling the helpline during the period of one week, from the 22nd to 26th January. These calls were taken by 12 regional offices around the country. It is therefore important to consider whether the calls sampled and the responses obtained in the 2007 survey are representative of calls year-round in terms of the offices fielding those calls. They could in theory be unrepresentative as a result of calls during the reference period differing from the yearly averages – perhaps due to varying success encouraging callers to participate between offices and variations in response rates. If the achieved sample is not representative, there is a possibility that results from the survey might give a biased account of helpline users and there may be a case for weighting the survey results, as was done in the 2005 survey.

Preliminary analysis of the 2007 survey results led to the decision that weighting was not, in fact, warranted. While there were some discrepancies between the proportions of calls to certain offices within the sample and the proportions obtaining year-round (as recorded through the helpline management information system), these did not appear to impact on the substantive results of the survey. Calls over 2006/2007 and within the survey breakdown by office are in the following table:

Appendix Table 1.2: Calls fielded by helpline offices (%)

Office	Within sample	2006/2007 management information	Over (under) representation
Birmingham	9.59	7.48	2.11
Bristol	7.16	5.38	1.78
Bury	9.53	4.51	5.02
Cardiff	4.90	6.85	(1.95)
Fleet	5.56	6.11	(0.55)
Glasgow	8.43	12.21	(3.78)
Leeds	11.46	9.20	2.26
Liverpool	2.98	6.05	(3.07)
London	18.79	12.23	6.56
Manchester	7.00	8.53	(1.53)
Newcastle	6.01	12.71	(6.70)
Nottingham	8.60	8.76	(0.16)

Source: IES Survey 2007 and Acas helpline management information

It can be observed that, within the survey, there is over-representation of some offices, notably Bury and London, and under-representation of others, notably Newcastle. This, however, does not appear to impact on the substantive results of the survey. Each office fields calls from across the country, so there is not necessarily a regional difference in the demographics of callers by office. While users across the offices may be similar, user experiences may conceivably vary between offices. To test sensitivity of user experience results in the survey to the composition of the sample, the survey data was weighted back to the year-round breakdown by office and key results were compared using the weighted and unweighted data. The key user-experience variables tested (all on five-point scales) were:

Q7: Information provided answered your enquiry in full/ helped you to decide what to do next/ was valuable to you (degree of agreement)

Q11: Acas member of staff was courteous/ was knowledgeable/ behaved in a professional manner/ presented the information in an impartial way/ understood query/ gave enough time to discuss query/ (degree of agreement)

Q12: Considering everything, how satisfied were you with the service you received (degree of satisfaction)

The maximum difference in results obtained when comparing the weighted and the unweighted datasets was of 0.7 percentage points: while 42.2 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement 'information provided helped you to decide what to do next', this proportion falls to 41.5 per cent when using the weighted data. However, the great majority of results were much more similar and the average difference was of only 0.2 percentage points. Furthermore, there was no consistent pattern of the weighting inflating or depressing results (bias). Given that the sensitivity of these results to weighting is very low and given that any weighting introduces a 'design effect' that can reduce the accuracy with which results can be reported, the remainder of the analysis in this report has been conducted on unweighted data.

Statistical significance

Relationships are only reported in the text of the report if they are statistically significant, except in the cases of multiple response questions. Due to overlap of responses, it is not appropriate to use significance testing on multiple responses. Therefore, the figures given for multiple response questions are not based on significance testing. These are percentage distribution of callers' responses within each relevant response category. Significance is measured at a cut-off of 95 per cent significance in a two-sided test. However, if the minimum expected frequency is less than one, or the number of cells with an expected frequency of less than five applies to more than 20 per cent of the cells, the sample size is too small for the test to be reliable, and the result is not reported as significant, regardless of the Chi-Square statistic. Pearson's Chi-Square has been used to test significance on cross-tabulations and One-Way ANOVA has been used to test significance on mean scores.

APPENDIX 2: SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Appendix Table 2.1: Employers' characteristics in terms of where respondents worked

		% *	N
All callers		100	1,822
Sector	Public	26	443
	Private	59	1,006
	Not-for-profit/voluntary	8	139
	Don't know	7	119
SIC	Manufacturing	13	228
	Construction	6	102
	Distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants	20	350
	Transport, storage and communication	10	168
	Banking, finance, insurance, etc.	12	210
	Public admin, education & health	21	362
	Other services (other than given above, including agriculture, mining and quarrying, electricity, gas and water supply)	17	296
No. of employees	1 to 4	12	220
	5 to 9	16	275
	10 to 49	35	621
	50 to 99	10	180
	100 to 249	10	183
	250 to 499	5	83
	500+	8	134
	Don't know	4	73
Part of larger organisation	Yes	42	740
	No	57	999
	Don't know	1	25

		%*	N
If yes, no. of employees	Less than 50	5	37
	50 to 249	12	92
	250 to 499	8	61
	500 to 999	6	45
	1000 to 5000	18	132
	5000+	24	177
	Don't know	27	201
How long organisation has been in business	Less than 12 months	3	60
	1 to 2 years	4	69
	2 to 5 years	10	183
	More than 5 years	75	1,329
	Don't know	7	126
Have personnel or HR specialist	Yes	42	745
	No	49	870
	Don't know	8	148

* Non-responses are not included in the calculations of percentages and, therefore, these are valid percentages.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Appendix Table 2.2: Characteristics of employees' jobs

		%*	N
All callers		100	1,822
Work status	Full-time employee	69	1,181
	Part-time employee	22	371
	Self-employed	9	148
	Agency worker/temp	1	12
SOC	Managers and professionals	48	825
	Clerical and skilled manual	34	588
	Services and sales	10	172
	Operatives and unskilled	8	139

* Non-responses are not included in the calculations of percentages and, therefore, these are valid percentages.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Appendix Table 2.3: Callers' mean scores on 'the information provided...'*

		Answered enquiry in full	Helped callers decide what to do next	Valuable to callers	N
All callers		4.27	4.22	4.33	1,822
Those calling as	An employer	4.28	4.26	4.35	581
	An employee	4.24	4.15	4.30	660
	A former employee	4.08	4.09	4.11	97
	On behalf of an employer	4.31	4.26	4.40	222
	On behalf of an employee	4.47	4.42	4.48	136
SIC	Manufacturing	4.17	4.10	4.28	221
	Construction	4.31	4.26	4.35	98
	Distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants	4.29	4.26	4.31	327
	Transport, storage and communication	4.22	4.15	4.32	157
	Banking, finance, insurance, etc.	4.25	4.16	4.30	205
	Public admin, education and health	4.36	4.36	4.43	341
	Other services	4.26	4.19	4.33	279
No. of employees	1 to 4	4.43	4.39	4.51	197
	5 to 9	4.25	4.18	4.30	266
	10 to 49	4.31	4.26	4.36	590
	50 to 99	4.29	4.20	4.34	172
	100 to 249	4.15	4.08	4.29	174
	250 to 499	4.19	4.17	4.23	80
	500+	4.10	4.11	4.23	131

		Answered enquiry in full	Helped callers decide what to do next	Valuable to callers	N
Religion	None	4.25	4.23	4.35	385
	Christian	4.30	4.23	4.34	1,248
	Other	3.92	3.91	4.24	54
Work status	Full-time employee	4.24	4.20	4.33	1,128
	Part-time employee	4.38	4.26	4.39	347
	Self-employed	4.36	4.33	4.38	136
	Agency worker/temp	4.17	3.70	3.50	12
Have HR specialist?	Yes	4.18	4.16	4.26	706
	No	4.34	4.27	4.41	829
Got through on first call?	Yes, immediately	4.44	4.31	4.45	895
	Yes, after queue	4.15	4.18	4.28	373
	No, all lines busy	4.06	4.09	4.17	414
	No, hung up	3.31	3.25	3.31	16

* = Mean scores do not include non-responses.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Appendix Table 2.4: Callers' mean scores on 'the Acas member of staff...'*

		Courteous	Knowledgeable	Professional	Impartial presentation of information	Understood query	Gave enough time to discuss	Information given easily understood	N
All callers		4.59	4.49	4.57	4.49	4.46	4.43	4.45	1,822
Calling as	An employer	4.54	4.45	4.51	4.43	4.46	4.40	4.40	607
	An employee	4.62	4.51	4.62	4.53	4.47	4.46	4.49	690
	A former employee	4.49	4.37	4.43	4.40	4.32	4.28	4.36	105
	On behalf of an employer	4.59	4.52	4.59	4.51	4.49	4.46	4.56	228
	On behalf of an employee	4.69	4.59	4.63	4.56	4.52	4.55	4.45	143
Age	18–24	4.41	4.37	4.49	4.34	4.28	4.32	4.28	65
	25–34	4.61	4.48	4.60	4.50	4.45	4.41	4.48	362
	35–49	4.57	4.48	4.56	4.47	4.46	4.44	4.44	774
	50–59	4.63	4.52	4.59	4.54	4.49	4.43	4.44	393
	60–65	4.64	4.60	4.62	4.57	4.58	4.56	4.61	129
	over 65	4.54	4.47	4.48	4.43	4.39	4.38	4.46	37

		Courteous	Knowledgeable	Professional	Impartial presentation of information	Understood query	Gave enough time to discuss	Information given easily understood	N
No. of employees	1–4	4.67	4.60	4.66	4.56	4.53	4.52	4.52	218
	5–9	4.59	4.51	4.56	4.50	4.47	4.47	4.44	272
	10–49	4.61	4.53	4.61	4.53	4.51	4.46	4.47	617
	50–99	4.60	4.50	4.57	4.47	4.47	4.45	4.48	180
	100–249	4.48	4.42	4.45	4.46	4.38	4.36	4.42	182
	250–499	4.55	4.40	4.56	4.40	4.41	4.35	4.44	83
	500+	4.53	4.34	4.51	4.37	4.34	4.27	4.34	132
Ethnicity	White	4.59	4.50	4.58	4.50	4.47	4.44	4.46	1,673
	Other	4.53	4.37	4.50	4.39	4.33	4.36	4.37	103
Religion	None	4.57	4.47	4.55	4.49	4.43	4.37	4.41	396
	Christian	4.60	4.51	4.59	4.50	4.49	4.46	4.47	1,314
	Other	4.50	4.23	4.41	4.26	4.29	4.30	4.31	56
Have HR specialist?	Yes	4.54	4.40	4.53	4.43	4.38	4.36	4.40	742
	No	4.62	4.56	4.60	4.53	4.52	4.49	4.48	861
Got through on first call?	Yes, immediately	4.67	4.60	4.65	4.58	4.59	4.56	4.58	929
	Yes, after queue	4.50	4.42	4.51	4.40	4.36	4.35	4.35	398
	No, lines busy	4.51	4.34	4.47	4.39	4.30	4.27	4.29	432
	No, hung up	3.75	4.44	3.87	3.69	3.56	3.31	3.37	16

* = Mean scores do not include non-responses.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Appendix Table 2.5: Callers' mean scores on overall satisfaction*

		Overall satisfaction	N
All callers		4.54	1,822
Those calling as	An employer	4.54	607
	An employee	4.53	696
	A former employee	4.41	103
	On behalf of an employer	4.64	228
	On behalf of an employee	4.68	142
No. of employees	1–4	4.64	217
	5–9	4.54	274
	10–49	4.60	615
	50–99	4.60	179
	100–249	4.50	183
	250–499	4.58	82
	500+	4.38	134
Religion	None	4.51	394
	Christian	4.59	1,319
	Other	4.30	56
Have HR specialist?	Yes	4.46	743
	No	4.63	861
Main subject area of call	Maternity, paternity & adoption	4.56	224
	Contracts	4.63	193
	Diversity and discrimination	4.22	62
	Discipline, dismissal & grievance	4.56	401
	Absence, sickness and stress	4.58	119
	Family friendly policies	4.81	52
	Holidays and working time	4.58	141
	Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers	4.56	277
	Wages and NMW	4.50	76
	Other	4.51	116
	Got through on first call?	Yes, immediately	4.70
Yes, after queue		4.48	398
No, all lines busy		4.35	433
No, hung up		3.13	15

* = Mean scores do not include non-responses.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

Appendix Table 2.6: Callers would recommend the Acas helpline to a friend or work colleague*

		Likelihood of recommendation (mean score)	N
All callers		4.72	1,822
Age	18–24	4.55	65
	25–34	4.73	362
	35–49	4.73	776
	50–59	4.71	397
	60–65	4.87	133
	Over 65	4.41	39
No. of employees	1–4	4.76	219
	5–9	4.73	274
	10–49	4.74	618
	50–99	4.76	180
	100–249	4.73	183
	250–499	4.69	83
	500+	4.55	134
Work status	Full-time employee	4.73	1,177
	Part-time employee	4.78	371
	Self-employed	4.66	147
	Agency worker/temp	4.33	12
SIC	Manufacturing	4.66	228
	Construction	4.70	102
	Distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants	4.76	348
	Transport, storage and communication	4.80	168
	Banking, finance, insurance, etc.	4.70	210
	Public admin, education and health	4.78	360
	Other services	4.66	296
Have HR specialist?	Yes	4.67	743
	No	4.76	867
Got through on first call?	Yes, immediately	4.80	936
	Yes, after queue	4.66	400
	No, all lines busy	4.62	434
	No, hung up	3.94	16

* = Mean scores do not include non-responses.

Source: IES Survey, 2007

APPENDIX 3: EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNALS IMPACT CALCULATION

Formal legal proceedings are often lengthy, expensive and adversarial. Acas provides advice and conciliation that can promote balanced, timely and proportionate resolution of disputes without recourse to the courts. The impact of Acas conciliation services on cases averted is relatively straightforward: all claims are referred to Acas but only around a quarter are subsequently taken all the way. The helpline's impact, however, has not been measured until this year.

This year's survey suggests that information provided by the helpline may have helped to avoid 16,190 Employment Tribunal cases. The calculation is as follows.

Around 232,850 employees and former employees called the Acas helpline in 2006¹. According to the survey, 23.1 per cent of these had been considering taking a claim to an Employment Tribunal before their helpline call. This equates to 53,788 people over the course of the year. Of these, the survey shows 30.1 per cent – or 16,190² – deciding against pursuing a claim on the strength of the information provided by the helpline³.

In addition to those deciding against making a claim, there may also be some cases where callers submitted an ET claim following their call to Acas, even though they had not previously intended to do so. According to the survey, 63.6 per cent of employees and former employees – or 148,092 callers throughout the year – had not been considering a claim prior to calling. Of these, 3.7 per cent went on to make a claim, equating to 5,479⁴ callers over the course of the year (or just under a third of the number of cases that are avoided).

¹ According to Acas management information, there were 472,685 calls to the Helpline from employees and former employees between February 2006 and January 2007. The survey suggests an average of 2.03 calls per employee. Applying this proportion to calls throughout the year, we can estimate that 232,850 employees and former employees called the Acas helpline in 2006.

² Based on the sample of 1,822 and the population of 472,685, the 95 per cent confidence interval for this estimate is +/- 0.8 per cent (or around 3,800).

³ In other words, they decided against making a claim to the Employment Tribunal following their call to the Helpline AND they rated their call as 'very important' or 'quite important' in helping them to reach that decision. This is necessarily a blunt estimate of impact as the counterfactual is impossible to assess; most importantly, there are likely to have been a number of callers 'considering' making a claim who would not, in the end, have made a claim – regardless of advice received.

⁴ The 95 per cent confidence interval for this estimate is +/-0.5 per cent (or around 2,600).

