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Research Paper

Acas workplace training impact survey 2008

Ref: 04/08

2008
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Acas Workplace Training Impact Survey 2008

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The Institute for Employment Studies

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Acknowledgements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the findings of the first survey investigating the impacts of Acas' Workplace Training service on its customers. The survey was commissioned by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) and undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Employment Research Limited (ERL).

Acas Workplace Training is a fee-paying service offering bespoke in-house training to British employers. Subject areas covered by Workplace Training can be broadly classified as comprising 'employment relations', 'fair treatment at work', and 'HR and people management' issues. Within these areas, a range of training topics are offered, such as bullying and harassment, equality and diversity and absence management.

Method

The survey was a census of organisations that had completed Workplace Training over a 12 month period: with a few exceptions, interviews took place between 3 and 15 months after the training event in question. Interviews took place between November 2007 and January 2008. In each case, one telephone interview was conducted with the main commissioning client, or the person with the best overview of the training and its effect on the organisation. In total, 418 telephone interviews were conducted, giving an adjusted response rate[1] of 81 per cent of the valid population.

Technical findings relating to issues in the research design are discussed in Appendices 1 and 2.

Lead-up to training

The survey asked clients about various aspects of the 'lead-up' to the Workplace Training event, including why they decided to conduct the training, why they chose Acas as a service provider and what the training objectives were.

Overall, by far the most important reason for commissioning the training was to help the client deal with a recognised organisational problem or improve in a specific topic area (reported by 52 per cent of respondents). Other reasons included meeting legislative requirements, to inform the development of policies, to help implement policies, and to be seen to be following 'good practice'.

The most common reasons for choosing Acas as a service provider was that the organisation had good experience working with them in the past (noted by 51 per cent of respondents). Other common reasons were Acas' good reputation as a training provider and recognised expertise in employment relations and HR. A minority valued Acas for being an independent voice, either regarding the

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[1] Based on Institute for Social and Economic Research's 'co-operation rate' for face-to-face interviews (Lynn et al, 2001).

disparate interests of management and employee representatives, or regarding Government legislation.

Overall, the most common objective was improving staff knowledge. Seven out of ten respondents listed this as being among their one or two most important training objectives. This was followed in importance by improving adherence to policies and procedures, improving employment relations and promoting equality or diversity (listed by 42 per cent, 34 per cent and 22 per cent of respondents respectively).

Training outcomes

Respondents were asked to what extent the training had met its objectives and were also asked about the specific impact of the training at three main levels: participants' knowledge and behaviour; organisational practices, culture and capacity to manage employment relations and HR issues; and bottom-line variables relating to employment relations and HR.

Almost half of respondents (48 per cent) said that their original objectives had been 'completely' met and the great majority (95 per cent) reported having achieved their objectives to at least some extent. These results were similar for the three main subject areas of Workplace Training, suggesting that Acas provides quality training across the range of topics it offers.

The great majority of respondents felt that the training had had positive impacts on various aspects of its participants' knowledge and behaviour. Positive impacts were noted by 86 per cent of respondents on trainees' awareness of their responsibilities; by 83 per cent on participants' ability to deal effectively with the training topic area; by 76 per cent on participants' awareness of their rights; and by 75 per cent on adherence to the organisation's policies. This makes the service very successful in relation to the primary objective of training, viz. improving staff knowledge.

The most commonly noted positive organisational impact was in the organisation's overall ability to deal effectively with the training topic area, which was mentioned by four-fifths (78 per cent) of all respondents. Also very common were positive impacts on the effectiveness and timeliness with which employment relations issues were dealt with (69 per cent and 65 per cent respectively). Good proportions of respondents (between 36 and 43 per cent) also felt the training had contributed to the fair treatment of employees, the ability to manage HR change, staff morale, and levels of trust between management and employees and between senior management and employee representatives.

Bottom-line organisational impacts were less commonly reported. The main results were: nine per cent of respondents noted a change in the number of grievances that they attributed at least in part to the Workplace Training; eight per cent of respondents attributed an increase in productivity in part to the training; and seven per cent attributed a decrease in absence levels in part to the training.

Levels of satisfaction

Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with Workplace Training and whether they considered it good value for money. Satisfaction levels were very high, with two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents claiming to be 'very satisfied' and a further 28 per cent stating that they were 'satisfied' with the service. The great majority also thought that the service was either 'very good' (54 per cent of respondents) or 'good' (33 per cent) value for money.

Almost all respondents (97 per cent) said they recommend Acas Workplace Training to others and seven out of ten (68 per cent) thought that they would be 'very likely' to use the Workplace Training service again themselves.

Factors affecting training outcomes

Statistical analysis was undertaken to identify the factors which most affected client satisfaction with the training. The strongest predictor of high client satisfaction was found to be the achievement of the training objectives, followed closely by customers' perception of the service as being good value for money.

Analysis was also conducted to determine which aspects of the training were most closely related with the achievement of its objectives. The results indicated that objectives were less likely to have been fully met in cases where the Workplace Training had been part of a wider programme, and in cases where the main objective had been to improve employment relations or organisational performance. This is most likely an indication that objectives which are less focused and specific are harder to achieve. A further finding was that the odds of Workplace Training fully meeting its objectives increased when HR staff had been involved in tailoring it to the organisation's needs

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the findings of the first survey investigating the impacts of bespoke in-company 'Workplace Training' provided by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas). The survey was commissioned by Acas and was undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Employment Research Limited (ERL), both independent research organisations.

Acas' national programme of face-to-face Workplace Training is a fee-paying service offering bespoke in-house training to British employers. It covers a wide range of subjects, which broadly encompass employment relations, fair treatment at work, and HR and people management.

Events are run within individual organisations, with standard Acas training content adapted and tailored towards the particular needs of the individual organisation.[2] Delegates ordinarily include representatives of both managers and employees from a single organisation, and even though the organisation will select trainees from among their staff, Acas aims to involve both representatives of management and employees where appropriate.

Acas regularly evaluates customer attitudes towards its training provision. However, in the case of Workplace Training, this has historically entailed surveying trainees themselves, immediately following training, to gauge their attitudes towards the service in the short-term. This research is the first to assess the medium- to long-term organisational impacts of Workplace Training. It was done by surveying the commissioning clients of the service 3–15 months post intervention.

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[2] As well as training tailored to organisations' specific needs, Acas provides standardised 'Open Access' training courses, to which any individual may subscribe – see Section 2.2.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes existing approaches to evaluation research and the nature of Workplace Training and explains how they were drawn upon to inform the methods, models and frameworks of this evaluation survey. A more detailed description of the methods used can be found in Appendix 1.

2.1. Evaluating training and its impact

Type of data generated

One influence on the basic research design was Pulley's (1994) concept of 'responsive evaluation', which states the need to tailor evaluations to decision-makers' needs for particular types of information. Training evaluations are most commonly conducted by the commissioner or recipient organisation and much of the literature is written with this assumption. In this case, it was not the commissioning organisation but the provider, Acas, which sought data to contribute to evidence of its performance against its service level agreement with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

Thus, a key reason for interviewing the main commissioning client a period of time after the training was that Acas aims to affect sustainable improvements in employment relations. Further, we liaised with Acas' Research and Evaluation Section to ensure that the main interests of stakeholders would be covered by the methods of data collection and that the format of data would be appropriate and useful.

Level of training impact for consideration

The best known of the models used to assess training impact is Kirkpatrick's (1994) four-level approach. This consists of the following stages:

1. learner feedback on satisfaction with intervention

2. change in learner knowledge

3. change in learner behaviour

4. organisational impact.

Kirkpatrick's approach has been criticised on methodological and conceptual grounds (Tamkin et al., 2002), but is nonetheless helpful in focusing on the level at which training impact is to be assessed and most subsequent models follow this structure. Training evaluation is typically patchy in the proportion of interventions covered. The CIPD's 2006 Learning and Development Survey reported that less than 50 per cent of training events were evaluated at Kirkpatrick level 2 or above, and only nine per cent evaluated at least three-quarters of their training interventions to level 4 (CIPD, 2006:28). Assessment criteria most frequently centred on meeting current and future skills needs, with fewer than half of the respondents considering impact on efficiency, productivity, staff turnover, sales targets or profits (ibid.).

Prior to this survey, Acas had already surveyed individuals immediately after participating in the training event and wished to focus on the broader medium-

and long-term impact of Workplace Training. We identified measures that were likely to be most powerful, and considered which indicators could be captured via our selected data-collection approach.

In deciding on appropriate measures, we therefore considered what data on training impact was likely to have been produced by organisations that could be accessed for assessment, as well as what information clients would be able to recall or make judgement on. The higher one moves up the Kirkpatrick levels, the more difficult it becomes to trace causality between a training intervention and aggregate measures of performance outcomes. For example, Holton comments that there is 'almost no research on factors influencing the transfer of individual performance into organisational performance results' (2005:49). Similarly, the CIPD's 2006 Learning and Development Survey showed that while a majority of organisations evaluate training impact in terms of immediate learner reaction and changes in knowledge and behaviour, only 36 per cent attempt to evaluate impact at an organisational level (CIPD, 2006:27).

More fundamentally, it is doubtful whether attempting to evaluate the impact of Acas training interventions on financial outcomes is appropriate. Most training is not designed with the intention of meeting the highest level organisational goals in mind (Bates, 2004) and is not dependent on the integration of training strategy with business strategy: rather, it seeks to help the organisation attain subordinate goals which feed into the overarching strategy.

Indeed, a degree of distance from ultimate financial performance measures is evident in the nature of many of the training courses that Acas offers. The topics of Acas' workplace training interventions are concerned with solving immediate workplace relations problems, preventing future ones or mitigating people management risks in the workplace. This training may involve the acquisition of technical knowledge and learning to use decision-making criteria appropriately, for example, in understanding and applying employment law correctly. However, Acas training is also likely to be skills-based and may involve soft skills in handling staff issues sensitively. Here again, experts have pointed to the difficulties of linking soft skills training to hard organisational performance outcomes (Abernathy, 1999). The value in Acas' work is therefore likely to lie in helping organisations to remove or overcome factors that pose blockages to the implementation of organisational strategies.

The CIPD research discussed above suggests that organisations concentrate their training impact evaluation activity around individual knowledge and behavioural change. There is, therefore, significant potential to capture data which measures impact at this level. Furthermore, Acas' mission centres on the promotion of effective employment relations through management behaviour, strengthening the importance of focusing on these outcomes. Questioning participants about their own behavioural change may lead to self-reporting bias. To access this information, we therefore decided to survey commissioning staff (likely to be in HR roles) because they are likely to be expert discriminating observers of changes in staff behaviour and because they will have an overview that enables them to compare between staff and across time.

Development of training impact

Previous research by Tamkin and Hillage (1998) on the Investors in People (IiP) standard has shown that, according to the nature of the intervention, there can be a time lag in the impact chain of training. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, where the training involves transformational change of attitudes or values, participants may demonstrate initial resistance, frustration or even anger (Axtell et al., 1997), which could give an unduly negative impression of training impact if an evaluation is conducted too soon. This is particularly important when assessing interventions that have been conducted in inauspicious circumstances.

Secondly, the literature on cultural and values-based change stresses the length of time that it may take for full effects to occur. This is pertinent to many Acas training interventions where their purpose is to bring about changes in complex concepts such as trust or the employee relations climate. Equally, the longer the time period that has elapsed between training intervention and the evaluation of impact, the more likely that significant organisational change will have occurred, potentially diluting the impact or lowering perceptions of its significance. On this basis, we questioned staff from organisations which had completed an Acas Workplace Training course 3–15 months prior to interview.

Taking contextual influences into account

A considerable body of research suggests that no matter how well designed and delivered a training intervention, its impact can vary significantly between different workplaces, depending upon the individual establishment's capacity and will to make use of it. The importance of organisational context has gained increased attention in recent years when assessing the impact of state policy and has been promoted through the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997) through their development of 'realistic evaluation'.

This approach has important implications for this research project. Where training is reported to have a lower degree of impact, it is important to avoid making erroneous conclusions and to take into account organisational circumstances. Important contextual factors could include those which have affected individuals' ability to implement their learning in the workplace but also broader organisational factors that may shape how critical the training is to the organisation's current objectives.

Some helpful work has been done here by Holton (2005) who has developed a model of what he terms the 'learning transfer system' and identified a number of factors which influence how people apply knowledge/skills they have acquired in their workplaces. For example, Holly and Rainbird (2000) observe that any redundancy, restructuring, or other major organisational changes need to be assessed as mitigating influences on individual willingness to learn and apply knowledge and skills. Where the objective of training is to bring about cultural change or individual value changes, a degree of recognition and appreciation of the need for change may ease and accelerate the process.

The size and scale of the training intervention is also important. For example, it may be relatively easy to assess the consequences of training a few key line managers in a small organisation, but the consequences of training large

numbers of managers and employees through multiple interventions across a multi-site organisation will be much harder. Mattson (2005) recommends defining what level or domain of performance should be affected when evaluating training impact.

Disentangling the impact of multiple interventions

Evaluating the impact of a training subsystem on an organisation as an overall system is difficult because of interactions between training and other organisational variables. Training may be only part of a set of tools implemented to try to solve a problem or improve performance. Holly and Rainbird comment that 'evaluation tools are less able to measure the contribution of specific training interventions to more complex change processes, where training is one of a number of factors contributing to the intended outcome' (2000: 280). Thus, in measuring the impact of training, it is important to try to take account of factors such as what the objectives of the training were and how it related to other interventions.

A multiple focus: impact, value and effectiveness

Although the main focus of this research was to assess medium- and long-term training impact, it was also considered important to evaluate other aspects of the service that may support Acas' mission and objectives. Evaluation is essentially about judgement of worth (Nickols, 2005), and while gathering data on impact in recipient organisations is desirable, the difficulties discussed above in quantifying this suggest that a complementary strategy may also be helpful through assessing commissioner perceptions of the value of training received and how effective it was.

This approach has been used effectively in previous research into Acas interventions in the workplace. In Kessler and Purcell's evaluation of Acas Joint Working Parties, they debate and critique different ways of measuring workplace interventions and produce convincing evidence to show the power of these kinds of measures. They also argue that it is possible to infer connections to broader organisational outcomes from such measures: 'If a manager says that the organisation has benefited a lot from the Acas exercise, it seems reasonable to assume that this means that the organisation has become more effective in meeting its aims' (Kessler and Purcell, 1996: 671). These kind of generic questions could also form benchmark statements which Acas could build on in future surveys.

Therefore, in line with the work of Foss Hanssen (2005), we adopted a mixed and holistic model of evaluation which covered realisation of goals, the uncovering of the effects of training interventions that are important to client and provider (e.g. on organisational processes, management and employee behaviour and workplace climate), bottom-line benefits in productivity and cost-related organisational factors (e.g. staff absence and avoidance of industrial action) and indicators of client satisfaction.

2.2. Acas Workplace Training

The service in question is known within Acas as 'Workplace Training' to distinguish it from Acas' other training service product, 'Open Access Events',

which are an advertised programme of publicly available training. Where organisations have specific training needs, or wish to train a number of managers and employees, Acas adapts its existing course content to the requirements of the organisation. Workplace Training aims to involve both management and employees and has an underlying aim of promoting effective employment relations.

Several of the issues presented above are illustrated in the series of published case studies on Acas Workplace Training. For example, in the case of Swale Primary Care Trust, a range of impacts were seen to be pertinent to evaluating the Workplace Training (Acas, 2006a). These included an increase in managers' awareness of their responsibilities and boosted confidence in dealing with absence, bullying and harassment actively. Further, a fall in the number of absence figures and percentages of staff reporting bullying and harassment incidents were also reported as positive effects.

The importance of collaboration in the training process is well illustrated in the case of Patak's (Acas, 2004). In this instance, the senior managers recognised the benefits of a joint working process which led to improvements in existing policies and subsequently a drop in absenteeism and improvement in HR managers' confidence. Furthermore, the Patak's case study points to the complexity of establishing direct links between training and outcomes. As well as helping the organisation get to grips with its discipline and grievance procedures, an interviewee recognised that the training played a role in creating 'a more stable workforce'. However, it was not thought that the training had been the sole factor leading to improvements in staff morale, nor that the link was direct.

Tailoring training to organisational needs

A core aspect of Workplace Training is that it is tailored to client needs and expectations. Acas aims for this to happen in two main ways. Firstly, the subject matter should be relevant to the organisation's characteristics, policies and situation. In practice, this entails dovetailing 'standard' Acas training content on best practice and the law with information specifically relevant to the customers' own policies and procedures, with the aim of enabling trainees to reflect on their own position relative to best practice and statute. Secondly, the training structure and materials should be organised appropriately for the audience, for example, by adapting the 'pitch' and duration of presentations and amending case study scenarios to best reflect customers' own business environments.

Acas seeks to involve representatives of both management and employees in the process of tailoring the training to client needs. Acas policy guidance for advisers states:

> "Before agreeing to undertake Workplace Training, the Acas trainer should have carefully agreed the aims and objectives (outcomes) of any such training with senior managers in the client organisation and, where possible and appropriate, with employee representatives."

However, in practice, the involvement of trade union or other employee representatives is variable. Whereas initial training needs analysis (effectively the first step of the 'tailoring' process) is necessarily undertaken with commissioning parties (typically HR or training managers), involving employee representatives at

this and subsequent stages is not inevitable, often being dependant on Acas' own communication channels within the host organisation and/or the readiness of either party to meet Acas' request for the involvement of shop stewards or staff representatives. Furthermore, it may be that staff representatives are involved in tailoring less formally - and thus less visibly - via internal discussions with employers to which Acas are not party.

2.3. Implications for the current research

The issues presented above were taken into account in designing the research tools, in particular regarding how to measure impact and how to take due consideration of the organisational contexts in which training was commissioned and took place. These are now discussed in turn.

Measurement of impact

The research prioritised training outcomes of pertinence to the Acas mission, namely 'to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations'. Thus, one focus of the questionnaire design was defining and applying measures that best captured this goal, covering areas such as management behaviours that might improve employment relations and perceptions of training impact on workplace climate, trust and quality of communications.

Two important goals for Acas as a training provider concern the delivery of objectives and sustaining and growing repeat business. We, thus, measured levels of client satisfaction with the training and the degree to which they felt it had achieved its objectives, and supported them in their aspirations. In order to do this, we broadened the focus of the study to consider measures of 'effectiveness' and 'value' as well as 'impact'. These included questions concerning commissioner views of value for money, whether training achieved its objectives, willingness to give repeat business to Acas and willingness to recommend Acas as a training provider.

Training objectives often centre on goals subordinate to business strategies, i.e. solving more immediate problems. To ensure that measures of training impact were suitable, we identified the commissioners' intentions behind Workplace Training and assessed impact against those goals.

Nonetheless, the evaluation also included the indirect, but potentially no less valuable, impact that Acas training had on the capacity of organisations to pursue their goals and business objectives. This included questions on the numbers of employment and HR problems that needed resolution and alteration in staff disposition to deal with organisational change positively.

Changing staff attitudes and behaviours are particularly important goals for Acas training. The survey instrument therefore included questions on these outcomes. Kraiger et al. (1993) have identified three types of such impacts, which we included in the survey:

1. Cognitive: did participant knowledge or awareness of an employee relations issue improve?

2. Skill-based: did participant behaviour (e.g. adherence to policies and procedures) or ability to deal effectively with employment or HR issues change?

3. Effective (individual and group level): e.g. did management/employee or peer relationships change; did levels of trust improve or did the workplace climate change?

Background to training and factors affecting impact

Questions were asked about, and analysis conducted on, a range of factors that could potentially influence the impact of Workplace Training. These included the following areas.

Questions were asked to uncover variations in background and organisational factors, including organisation size, scale of training intervention, numbers of people involved, relative difficulty of objectives pursued and climate of readiness for the training. Questions were also asked on contextual variables of the training, including: whether it was compulsory; what its objectives were; who was involved in tailoring it to organisational needs; and how receptive staff were to the training. Furthermore, in analysing open questions, we also considered peer and subordinate support in implementing the training; the amount of time and resources that individuals have to help them in embedding new knowledge or behaviours; and any changes in business priorities that might divert their attention from implementing change.

We accounted for the fact that training impact can evolve over a period of time in two ways. Firstly, we designed the sample to include a time delay before measurement, while the primary effects of training bedded in (Newby, 1992). This was set at three months post intervention. Secondly, we took the incremental development of training impact into account by comparing the relative impact of interventions which have taken place at different points in time prior to the evaluation. This was set at a 12 month period. Thus, the sampling frame included client organisations that had completed Workplace Training 3–15 months previously.

It should be noted that another factor we considered in setting this period was the population size, i.e. the number of distinct organisations that we could approach which had undertaken Workplace Training. Taking into account realistic response rates, a 12 month period was estimated to be the safest minimum period from which we would be likely to obtain a sample sufficient to undertake reasonably powerful analysis (n=approximately 400).

Because combinations of different Acas training and advisory services may be used in parallel, we collected data on whether Workplace Training was the sole service being used to meet its particular organisational objective. This included management information on whether the organisation had had an Acas 'Workplace Project'[3] and a question on whether the training was part of a broader

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[3] A discrete advisory service provided by Acas, considerably different to Workplace Training.

'National Programme' of work. Whilst quantifying the relative impact of different Acas services was considered unrealistic, it is nonetheless desirable to gain an impression of the training commissioner's assessment of the contribution of the training to the overall objectives.

2.4. Research approach[4]

The aim of the survey was to evaluate the impact that Workplace Training has on its customers, particularly with regard to the promotion of effective employment relations. Measures were therefore designed to reflect this and covered a range of areas, including the impact of training on management behaviour. The survey also aimed to measure clients' views on the value and effectiveness of the training.

It was decided that the most efficient and reliable way of collecting the relevant data would be through a single interview for each organisation that had commissioned Workplace Training. Interviews were conducted by telephone by experienced researchers, in order to boost response rates and reduce respondent bias. The questionnaire used in the telephone interview can be seen in Appendix 3.

The population to be surveyed were lead contacts within organisations that had completed Workplace Training in the agreed timeframe (3–15 months previously) who were best placed to describe the aims and judge the medium- to long-term organisational impacts of the training. Typically, this was the main commissioner of the training, who often worked in an HR or HRD function. Nonetheless, in each case, the most appropriate person was identified in liaison with the organisation prior to interviewing. The pre-telephone letter and telephone contact therefore incorporated an element of screening.

The recruitment techniques and interview schedule were piloted with 20 eligible Workplace Training clients and the research materials adjusted accordingly. The survey aimed to interview between 400 and 500 distinct Workplace Training clients and interviews were designed to last 15 to 20 minutes. One or two weeks prior to the initial telephone contact, recruitment letters were sent by IES: these gave target respondents the opportunity to contact the research team to suggest alternative, more appropriate interviewees. All telephone contact (recruitment and interviewing) and data entry was carried out by Employment Research Limited. Interviews were conducted from November 2007 to January 2008.

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[4]   See Appendix 1 for a more detailed description of the research methods.

3. FINDINGS

Four hundred and eighteen interviews were successfully conducted, each with a different organisation. This is 57 per cent of the 734 named contacts provided by Acas. Adjusting for those contacts precluded from the research due to ineligibility or not being contactable (e.g. wrong telephone numbers) gives us a response rate of 81 per cent.[5]

3.1. Client characteristics

Region

The region of organisations was recorded in reference to the Acas regional office from which they received Workplace Training. By this measure, there was a good spread of response (see Figure 3.1). The majority of offices (7 out of 11) were represented by 32 (eight per cent of the achieved sample) to 42 (ten per cent) cases. The exceptions were Bristol (represented by six per cent), Bury St Edmunds (four per cent), Leeds (12 per cent) and London (14 per cent). This is in line with the distribution in the broader population.

Figure 3.1: Spread of Workplace Training delivery by Acas region
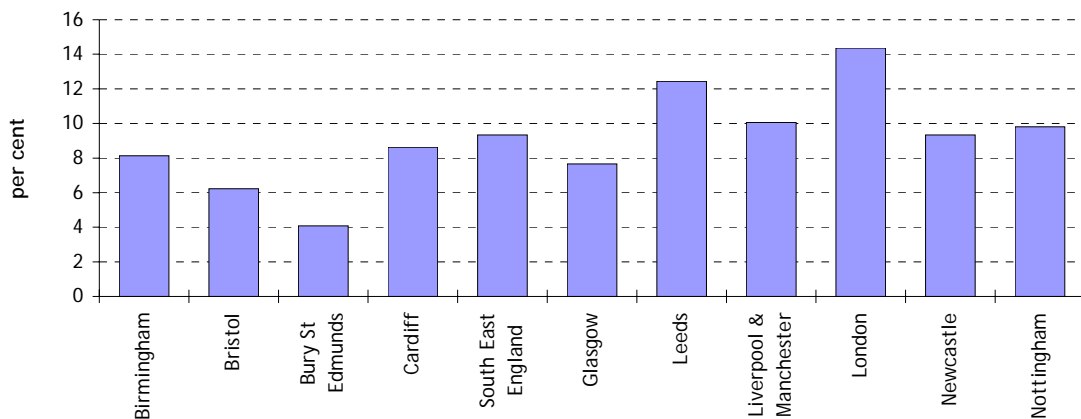
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Business activity

Business activity sector was taken from Acas management information. The spread of organisations by sector was uneven; organisations in Manufacturing (37 per cent) being especially well represented (see Figure 3.2). Health and Social Work (14 per cent), and Other Community, Social and Personal Services (11 per cent) were also more common than most sectors. Particularly poorly represented were organisations in Agriculture (one per cent), Construction (three per cent), and Hotels and Restaurants (one per cent); and the Electricity, Water and Gas

5   See Appendix 2 for discussion of survey response.

supply sector was not represented at all. Nonetheless, this spread is representative of the target population as a whole.

Figure 3.2: Spread of organisations by business activity
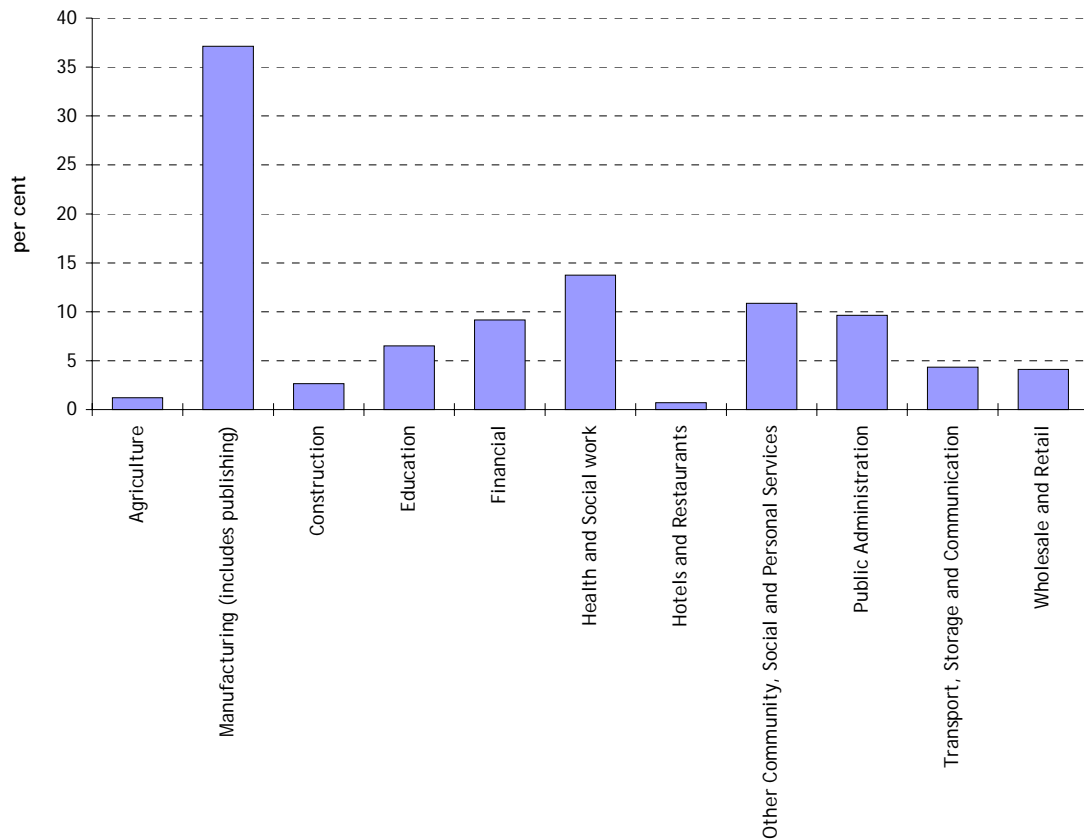
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Organisation size

The sample was skewed towards larger organisations, as is generally the case for the client base of Workplace Training. The great majority of cases (84 per cent) were organisations that employed 100 or more employees, and nearly half (48 per cent) of organisations employed 500 or more.

In some organisations that had more than one workplace, the training may not have covered the whole organisation, which could affect the organisational impact of the training. Thus, as well as overall number of employees, we asked respondents about the number of people employed at the site or sites that were covered by the training (i.e. sites from which Workplace Training delegates came). As is shown in Figure 3.3, the distribution is slightly less skewed towards larger organisations, but nonetheless similar to that of organisation size as a whole.

Figure 3.3: Organisation size and number of employees covered by Workplace Training
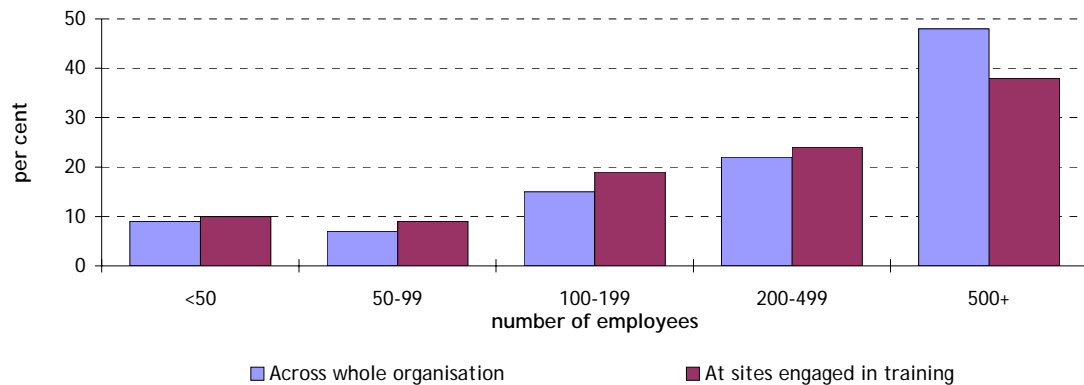
N=413
Source: IES, 2008

3.2. Training characteristics

Recency of training

As shown in Figure 3.4, the recency of the training was spread fairly evenly across the given 12 month period (from 3–15 months prior to the survey). There were a few outliers of respondents who reported that the training had occurred slightly before (N=3) or after (N=8) this period.

Figure 3.4: Recency of training
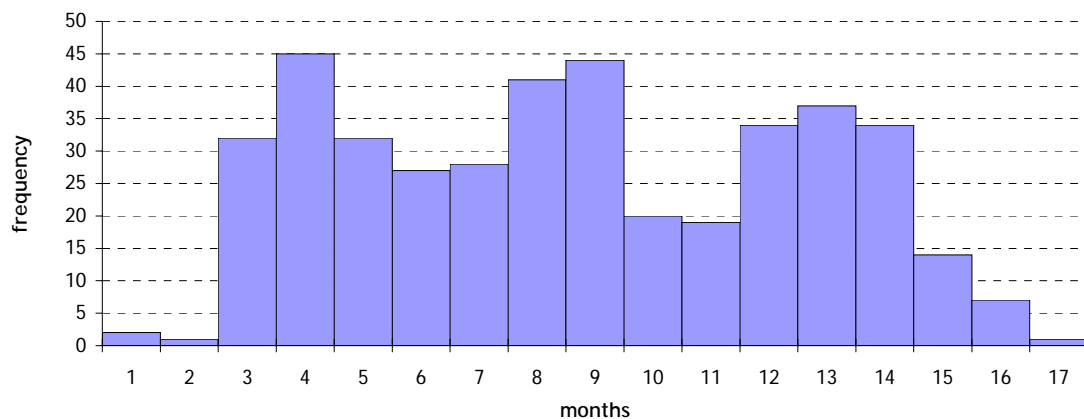
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Training topic

Workplace Training covers a large number of specific individual subjects, which can be sensibly grouped into three broad topic areas, namely employment relations, fair treatment at work, and other HR and people management topics. According to this grouping, a quarter (25 per cent) of respondents said their Workplace Training courses dealt with employment relations issues, just over a quarter (27 per cent) dealt specifically with fair treatment at work and nearly half

(46 per cent) dealt with other HR and people management issues. A breakdown of these topic areas into their individual subjects is shown in Table 3.1. The most common single subjects were discipline and grievance (26 per cent), equality and diversity (14 per cent) and information and consultation (11 per cent).[6]

Table 3.1: Respondent topic areas and subjects

Topic area	N	%	Topic subject	N	%
Employment relations	106	25	Employment law	17	4
			Information & consultation	46	11
			Negotiation & collective bargaining	34	8
			Redundancy/TUPE	9	2
Fair treatment at work	114	27	Age discrimination	26	6
			Bullying & harassment	30	7
			Equality & diversity	58	14
Other HR/people management	193	46	Discipline & grievance (inc. investigations)	109	26
			Employing people/recruitment	19	5
			Having difficult conversations	19	5
			Managing absence & attendance	19	5
			Mediation	9	2
			Supervision/line management	18	4
Other	5	1	Conflict management	2	0
			ACAS model workplace	1	0
			Passport to safety	1	0
			Review of policies and procedures	1	0
Total	418	100		418	100

Source: IES, 2008

Reasons for training

Respondents were asked about the reasons why the organisation commissioned the training and if they reported more than one reason, they were asked which was the most important (see Table 3.2).

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[6] There was further variation in the actual names given to training topics (e.g. we incorporate both 'Employee Forum' and 'Works Council' training within 'Information and Consultation'). A more detailed breakdown of training topics is presented in the technical findings (see Appendix 2).

By far the most common driver for commissioning training was to help with an organisational problem or improve in the topic area (cited by 67 per cent of respondents). The only other common driver was 'in response to legislation' (19 per cent). Results for the most important reason were similar, with these two reasons being cited by 52 per cent and 13 per cent of respondents respectively.

Although not strictly speaking a driver in itself, six per cent of respondents said that the reason for the training was to support a broader initiative or programme within the organisation, without mentioning what this change programme was. Further to this, all other respondents were explicitly asked whether the Workplace Training was 'part of a wider initiative or programme of change'. Thus, in total (including the above six per cent), over one-third (35 per cent) of respondents reported that this was the case.

Table 3.2: Reasons for commissioning training (column percentages)

	Reason/ reasons for training* %	Most important reason %
To meet legislative requirements	19	13
To meet requirements of parent organisation	1	1
To inform and help develop policies	10	9
To support implementation of or adherence to company policies	7	5
To help with an organisational problem or improve in topic area	67	52
To be seen to be following 'good practice'	7	3
As part of a wider initiative or programme of change in the organisation	6	5
Other reason(s)	16	12
N	418	416

Total more than 100 per cent due to multi-response variable.
Source: IES, 2008

Reasons for choosing Acas

Interviewees were asked why they had chosen Acas as a training provider and their responses were coded by the research team. A wide range of reasons were given, but by far the most common (cited by 51 per cent of respondents) was that organisations commissioned Acas because they had good experience of working with them in the past (see Figure 3.5).

Besides this, other common reasons for choosing Acas were that it had a good reputation as a training provider (33 per cent) and that it was considered to have good expertise, either specific expertise in the topic area (26 per cent) or general expertise in employment relations (19 per cent). Acas was also valued by some for being an independent and unbiased voice, either from management and trade unions (11 per cent), or from Government legislation (6 per cent).

Figure 3.5: Reasons for choosing Acas as a training provider
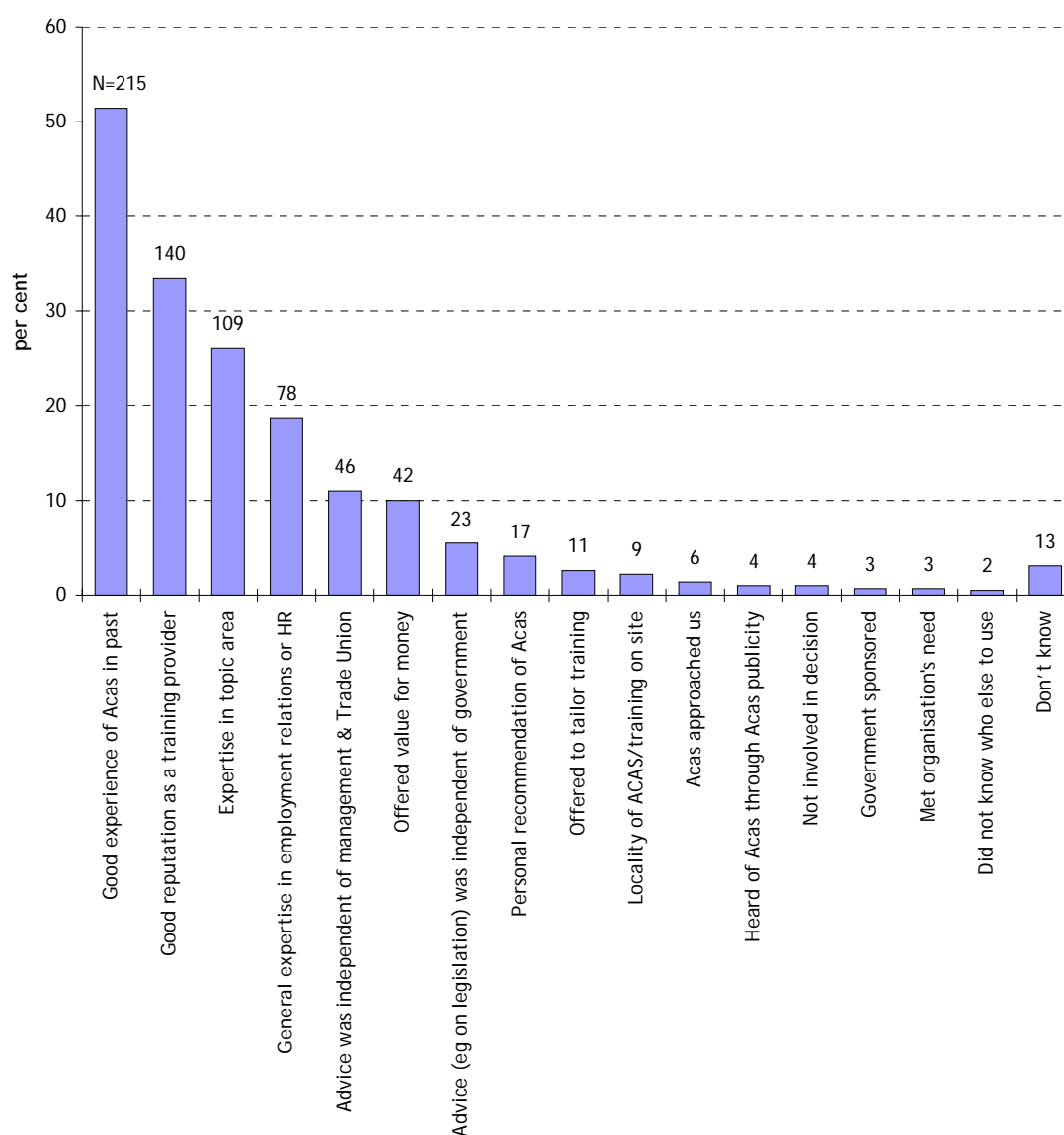
Note: Responses sum to more than 100 per cent, since this was a multiple-response question.
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

A few responses from the final question ("Is there anything else you would like to add…?") supported the notion that the solid reputation of Acas' expertise can make staff more amenable to the training. For example, comments included:

"Acas have a kudos that employees appreciate."

"Because of Acas' reputation, our employees sit up and take notice."

More specific reasons for choosing Acas included the fact that it offered a service that could be tailored to specific organisational needs; and the convenience of the service and the locality of its regional offices. One in ten respondents (ten per cent) singled out value for money as a reason for choosing Acas.

Twelve per cent of responding organisations had undertaken Acas Workplace Projects[7] prior to Workplace Training, which is representative of the target population.

Training objectives

Respondents were asked to describe what they had aimed to achieve from the training by rating the importance of a list of eight possible objectives (see Table 3.3). The objective that was by far the most common to be identified as 'very important' was improving staff knowledge (87 per cent of respondents). Other objectives that were commonly regarded as very important were: improving adherence to policies or procedures (57 per cent); improving employment relations (55 per cent); and promoting equality or diversity (40 per cent).

Table 3.3: Ranked importance of various training objectives (row percentages)

	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	N
Improving adherence to policies or procedures	57	32	5	7	417
Improving employee health or well-being	27	43	12	17	417
Reducing absenteeism	18	16	16	50	411
Improving employment relations	55	33	2	11	416
Improving the organisation's performance	33	39	8	20	413
Promoting equality or diversity	40	31	9	20	405
Improving staff knowledge	87	10	2	1	418
Reducing staff turnover	17	18	17	49	416

Source: IES, 2008

It is worth noting that with the exceptions of reducing absenteeism and staff turnover, both of which are specific objectives that are less relevant to some training topics, all objectives listed were identified by relatively high proportions of respondents as important to some extent. This suggests that many clients aimed to achieve a range of outcomes through Workplace Training. However, this data was collected retrospectively and respondents may have had trouble

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[7] Acas 'Workplace Projects' are advisory products designed to improve employment relations through 'collaborative working'. They are distinct from 'Workplace Training', being predicated on the joint involvement of trade unions and management and structured around problem solving and working groups, rather than conventional training. However, some Workplace Projects do lead on to Acas Workplace Training.

recalling what their original objectives had been. By contrast, objectives stated prior to setting up the training are likely to be more precise and accurate.

Figure 3.6: 'One or two' most important training objectives
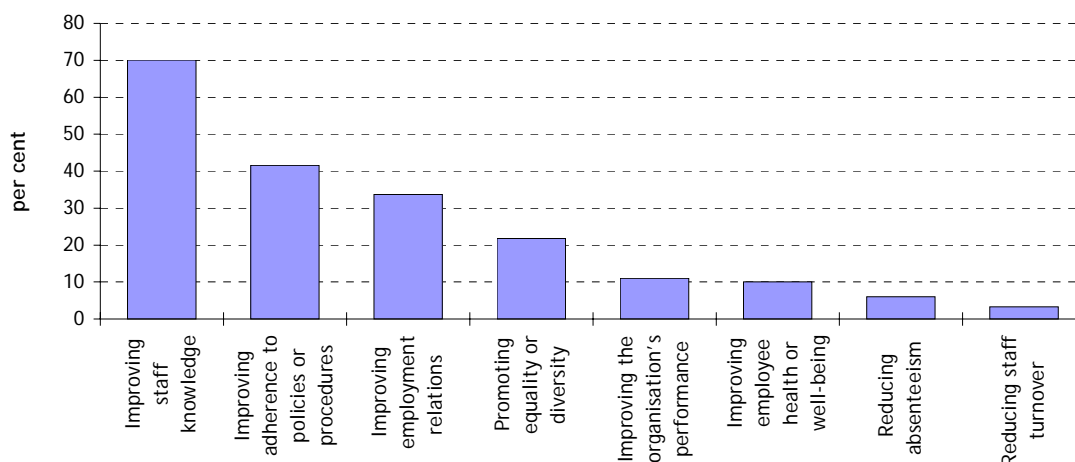
Note: Responses sum to more than 100 per cent, since this was a multiple-response question.
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

In anticipation of large proportions of responses being 'very important', we also decided to ask respondents to identify which 'one or two' objectives had been the most important (see Figure 3.6). The results follow a similar trend to those above, confirming that the most important objectives were improving staff knowledge (70 per cent of respondents); improving adherence to policies or procedures (42 per cent); improving employment relations (34 per cent); and promoting equality or diversity (22 per cent).

Organisation of training

Importance of tailoring training to the organisation

As mentioned above, the offer to tailor training to the organisation emerged as a key factor for some clients in choosing Acas as training provider (see Section 3.2). The importance of this offer was reinforced in the finding that tailoring the training was the single area most commonly discussed in response to the final question: "Is there anything else you would like to add…?" Here, responses mentioned tailoring the training both as a positive aspect of the service, and as an aspect where expectations had not been met.

Twenty-nine respondents (7% of the whole sample) pointed in some way to the tailored nature of Workplace Training being a particularly good aspect of the service. Some of these comments seemed to refer to the arrangements or format of the training; others referred to the tailored course content. Examples included:

> *"The course content was very good… This trainer was excellent in being able to adapt to people's individual concerns and suggestions without losing the main points of the issues."*

"Very helpful that can speak to actual trainer (as opposed to account manager, for example) before course starts to identify needs."

"Very responsive in having two preparation meetings, first to understand our company's needs and culture."

A smaller number of respondents (14, or 3% of the sample) reported that the training had been insufficiently tailored to their organisations' needs, either because the content was not sufficiently relevant, or because it was not at the right level for the participants. Here, responses included:

"It wasn't tailored to our organisation like we wanted. The trainers were very good and engaged people, and feedback was good, but the content was not geared to our needs."

"It is important to establish the level of knowledge of staff before the training starts. It was pitched at too high a level for us: Acas assumed we knew more than we did."

Persons involved in tailoring training

The questionnaire contained four questions on who from the organisation was involved in tailoring the training to its specific needs (see Figure 3.7). The options were: management, trade union, non-union staff representatives and 'anyone else' (open question).

Management were involved in tailoring the training to the organisation in three-quarters (77 per cent) of cases; non-trade union representatives were involved in a quarter (26 per cent) of cases; and trade union representatives were involved in one in eight cases (12 per cent).

Almost half (46 per cent) of respondents said that their organisations tailored their training courses with the expertise of 'other' staff. When asked who this 'other' group of staff was, the overwhelming majority (78 per cent, or 152 of the 194 respondents) reported that it was their HR function or related staff.[8]

It might usually be taken for granted that the HR function would be involved in tailoring Workplace Training, as it is typically organised through organisations' HR or training functions (see Section 2.2). However, this finding should not be overlooked, as further analysis found that these respondents who explicitly stated that HR helped tailor the training to the organisation were significantly more likely to have achieved their objectives. This is discussed in more detail below (Section 3.6), but overall, we can infer that the HR function was actively involved in tailoring Workplace Training in *a minimum* of 36 per cent of organisations.

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[8] This includes positions such as diversity champion, occupational health professional, and health and safety officer.

Figure 3.7: Persons involved in tailoring the training to the organisation
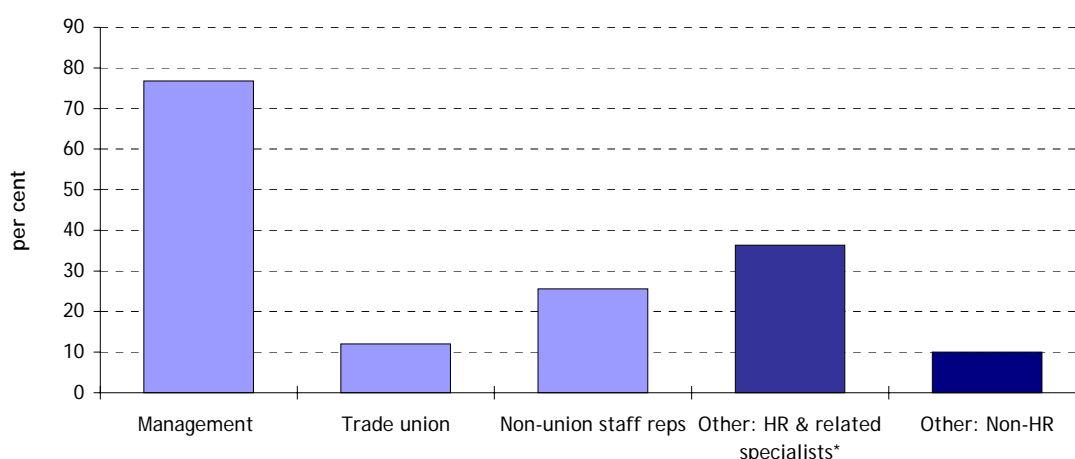
Note: Whether the HR function was involved in tailoring the training was not asked as a standard question. The true figure is therefore likely to be more than 36 per cent.
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Besides HR and related staff, 'other' groups of staff involved in tailoring the training were reported as board members (N=8), general staff (N=9), and other specialists, namely Child Care Providers, Councillors, Fire Authority Members, representatives of a clinical governance department, and a Students Union (N=5).

Training attendance

In the majority of cases (75 per cent), Workplace Training was attended by staff from across the organisation geographically. This included organisations that had only one site or workplace (24 per cent of the total) and organisations that had more than one site or workplace and sent training delegates from each of them (51 per cent). One-fifth (19 per cent) of organisations sent delegates from only one of their sites or workplaces; and six per cent sent delegates from two or more specific workplaces (but not all their workplaces).

Acas guidance states that the attendance of employee representatives at Workplace Training events "remains the ideal and for some training events [such as that on information and consultation] remains imperative". In organisations that do not have formal employee representative structures, Acas states that the adviser should encourage the employer to initiate staff representation for the purpose of the training.

The survey found it to be fairly common for employee representatives to attend Workplace Training. However, in almost half of cases there was no representative presence. Non-union staff representatives attended in two-fifths (41 per cent) of Workplace Training events; trade union representatives attended in just over a quarter (28 per cent); and full-time officers (FTOs) attended in five per cent. Overall, employee representatives of some sort were in attendance at half (51 per cent) of all Workplace Training events.

Training was made compulsory for staff in half (49 per cent) of organisations.

Staff attitudes to training

Respondents were asked their views on how well disposed their workforces had been to the 'underlying message' of their Workplace Training. The great majority (83 per cent) of respondents considered that their staff had been 'generally in favour' of the key message of the training. Fourteen per cent said that staff had 'mixed views' on the training topic; just two per cent said that staff were indifferent; and only one respondent said that staff had generally been against the underlying message of the training.

In-house evaluation of training

All but one respondent reported that their organisations had themselves attempted to gauge the success or impact of the training. A range of in-house evaluation methods were used, some more rigorous than others. By far the most common was the use of the Acas feedback forms handed out on the day (76 per cent of respondents) and discussing the training with colleagues, either informally or at meetings (71 per cent). Besides this, a quarter (26 per cent) of organisations used their own feedback forms, and one in eight (13 per cent) conducted a before-and-after survey with trainees; one in ten organisations surveyed delegates' line managers; and one in ten analysed outcomes that were related to the topic area (e.g. changes in staff absence levels).

Figure 3.8: In-house training evaluation methods used
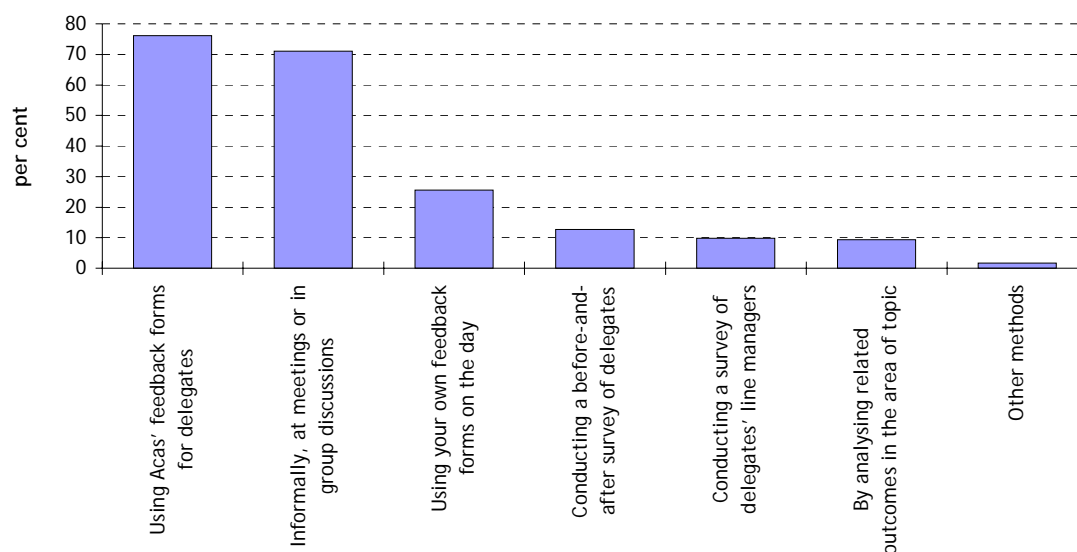
Note: responses sum to more than 100 per cent, since this was a multiple-response question.
N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Training delivery, content & administration

Respondents were not asked specific questions on their views on the delivery, content and administration of the training, as these aspects are covered by the

evaluation sheets given to participants on the day, which elicit overwhelmingly positive feedback (Acas, 2006b). Nonetheless, the last open question ("Is there anything else you would like to add…?") generated a number of comments on these areas.

Most notable was the number of comments on the delivery of the training, both positive and negative. Over 20 respondents highlighted the good delivery of the training, in particular that the training had a high impact and was accessible and engaging – for example:

> *"It was very worthwhile and informative. The presentation was very clear and precise and the delivery was interesting. The trainer had a good way of breaking up information so it was more manageable and interactive; not just sitting there all day, talking to us and passing on information."*

However, equally important is that almost as many (15 respondents) specified that the training delivery was poor or of mixed quality. Here, comments often focused on the variable quality of trainers, some of whom were judged to be much better than others. For example, one respondent said:

> *"The information was OK but the delivery was very dry. They didn't answer some of our questions and when they did, they didn't answer very well. Having an external organisation did add credibility to what we were doing, though, and I appreciate that the subject is rather dry and may be difficult to make sound interesting."*

A few respondents also reported that their trainers did not have sufficient area expertise. Others took issue with the trainer not being sufficiently 'business savvy' and appearing to be biased towards the perspective of employees.

However, this is at odds with a number of other respondents who singled out the training content as a particularly *positive* aspect of the service. Here, comments focused on Acas' expertise, the reliability of the content and its solid empirical base, and the balanced, independent perspective that was given. For example:

> *"Management were very apprehensive about the course to begin with, as they were worried that Acas would be 'unionised' and firmly on side of employee. However, it was apparent that Acas was interested in helping the employer do things properly and [the training] was pitched just right and not intimidating at all."*

Finally, several respondents pointed to the administration of the training service as having been a problem. Issues identified included arrangements being made or changed at the last minute, poor customer services and response to enquiries, relevant people at Acas being difficult to contact and unclear information on the Acas website. However, it is also worth noting that a couple of respondents were explicitly grateful for the levels of service they received from Acas after the training.

Notwithstanding the importance of negative feedback, it is worth noting that it was a small minority of respondents who expressed negative views (see following sections). Further, the responses to these open questions are unlikely to be highly

representative of clients in general, as the people who have the most to say tend to be those with the strongest views.

3.3. Achievement of objectives

Respondents were referred back to what they identified as the one or two most important objectives of the Workplace Training and asked to what extent they felt these had been achieved (see Table 3.4). Overall, nearly half (48 per cent) of respondents said that their main objectives had been 'completely achieved' and nearly half (46 per cent) said that they had been partly achieved. Only 12 respondents said that the main objectives had not been achieved at all.

Table 3.4: Perceived achievement of main objectives

	N	%
Completely achieved	202	48
Partly achieved	194	46
Not at all achieved	12	3
Don't know	10	2
Total	418	100

Source: IES, 2008

Figure 3.9: Perceived achievement of main objectives
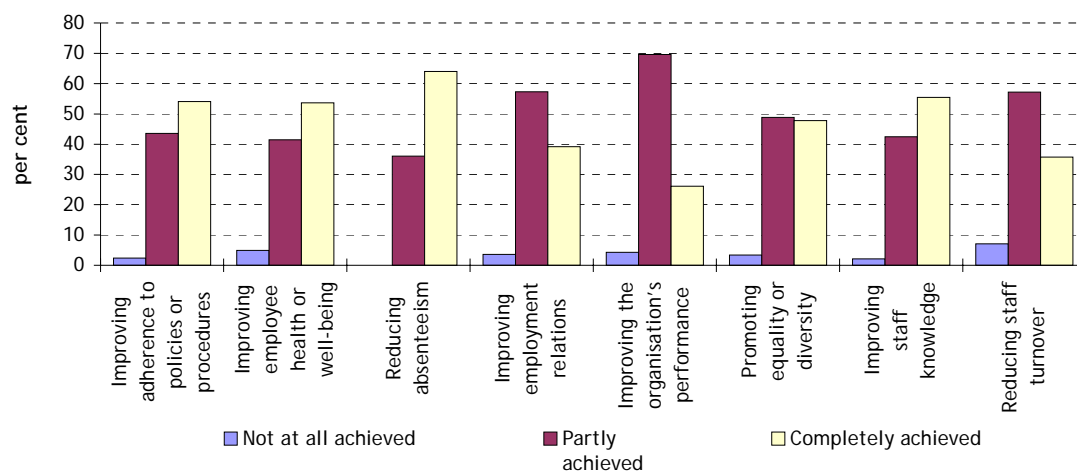
Source: IES, 2008

These figures vary according to the objectives to which they refer (see Figure 3.9). The greatest variation from the overall figures is among respondents who identified improving organisational performance as a main objective, of whom only 26 per cent reported completely meeting objectives. Respondents were also relatively less likely to report having completely achieved their objectives if they named improving employment relations as a main objective (39 per cent). Respondents were slightly more likely to report having completely achieved their objectives if they identified main objectives which were more closely related to the subject of the training, e.g. the objectives improving staff knowledge (55 per cent) and improving adherence to policies or procedures (54 per cent).

We also found that greater proportions reported completely achieving their objectives among those who identified their main objectives as reducing staff absence (64 per cent) and improving employee health or well-being (54 per cent); and smaller proportions (36 per cent) among those who listed reducing staff turnover as a main aim. However, it should be noted that these percentages are based on small cell counts and cannot be considered accurate.

Regarding the topic area of Workplace Training (see Section 3.2), training on fair treatment at work, for example, equality and diversity, completely met its objectives slightly more often than average, whereas training on other HR and people management issues (e.g. discipline and grievance) was slightly less likely to have done so (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Achievement of objectives by topic area (column percentages)

	Training topic area			
Achievement of objectives	**Employment relations %**	**Fair treatment at work* %**	**Other HR/people management %**	**Total %**
Completely achieved	50	54	46	49
Partly achieved	48	45	50	48
Not at all achieved	2	2	4	3
N	103	110	190	403

Percentages total more than 100 due to rounding.
Source: IES, 2008

3.4. Impact of training

Respondents were asked about three levels of potential impact of the training, namely: impacts on delegates' knowledge and behaviour; broader impacts on organisational practices, culture and capacity to manage employment relations and HR issues; and bottom-line impacts in employment relations, HR and productivity. These are now discussed in turn.

Impact on participants

Although the views of training delegates were obtained separately from this survey,[9] respondents were asked what impact they thought the training had had on its participants. Thus, the training impact was rated with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'very positive' through 'no impact' to 'very negative', on four key aspects of participants' knowledge and behaviour.

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[9] Trainees' views are collected at each Workplace Training event through a feedback form handed out on the day of the training.

As one would hope, the great majority of respondents thought there had been tangible positive impacts in each of the general areas. Aggregating 'slightly positive' and 'very positive', 86 per cent of all respondents (including those who said they did not know) noted a positive impact on trainees' awareness of their responsibilities; 83 per cent had seen a positive impact on participants' ability to deal effectively with the training topic area; 76 per cent saw a positive impact on participants' awareness of their rights; and 75 per cent noted that adherence to the organisation's policies had improved.

Figure 3.10 breaks these figures down into general topic areas. There is a broad similarity across the three topic categories, which suggests that Workplace Training is equally able to impact on participants in its various topic areas. The one clear exception to this concerned employment relations training, in which a positive impact on adherence to policy was less frequently noted than in training on either fair treatment at work or other HR issues (63 per cent as opposed to 80 and 79 per cent respectively).

Figure 3.10: Organisations reporting positive impacts on trainees, by topic area
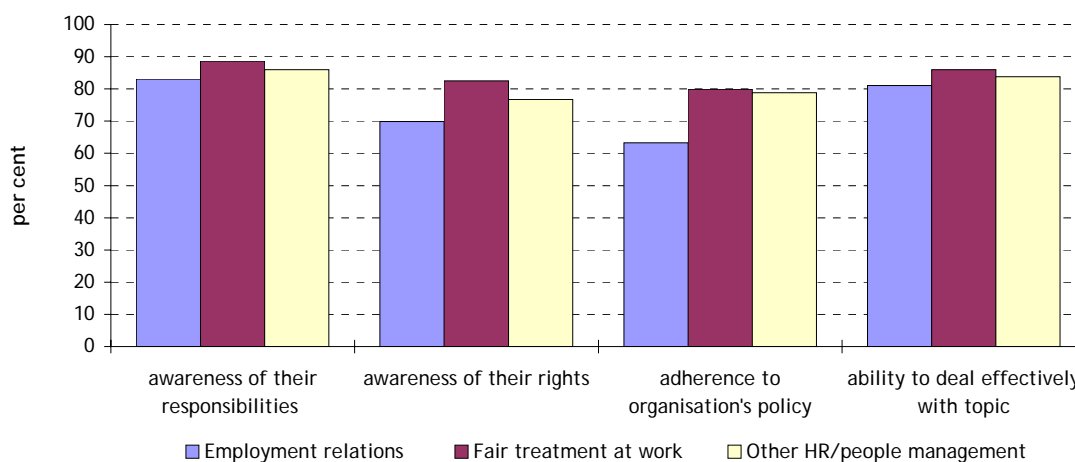
Source: IES, 2008

Beyond this, positive impacts on participants were slightly more often noted for training on fair treatment at work and slightly less so for employment relations training. However, care should be taken in interpreting these differences, as some of them are small and may not be statistically significant.

Table 3.6 shows a more detailed breakdown of the benefits that respondents perceived in trainees' knowledge and behaviour. Looking at which impacts were measured to be the greatest, the most common area in which a 'very positive' impact was seen was in participants' awareness of their responsibilities, noted by three-fifths of respondents (59 per cent). The areas in which respondents most frequently thought there had been no impact on the trainees were adherence to organisations' policies (14 per cent) and awareness of rights (13 per cent).

Although, as might be expected, the numbers of negative impacts observed were very low, any negative responses warrant close attention. Thus, respondents who

gave negative responses were asked why this was so, with their answers being recorded in verbatim.

Table 3.6: Workplace Training impacts on trainees (row percentages)

	Very positive %	Slightly positive %	No impact %	Slightly negative %	Very negative %	N
Awareness of responsibilities	59	36	4	1	0	**376**
Awareness of rights*	39	47	13	0	0	**366**
Adherence to organisation's policies*	38	46	14	1	0	**370**
Ability to deal effectively with topic area*	44	49	5	1	0	**372**

Note: excludes 'don't know' responses.
*Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.
Source: IES, 2008

It is interesting to note that most explanations for negative effects related to organisational barriers or the difficult nature of the topic area: only three respondents suggested that there may have been a problem actually caused by the training. One of these concerned Workplace Training on conflict management, which the respondent felt had caused some confusion: "*at the end of the course, they did not feel that conflict was fully defined*". Another respondent suggested that some managers were now over-aware of the topic area, feeling afraid that "*when they carry out legitimate processes*" they could be "*accused of bullying and harassment*". Finally, one comment, which also regarded training on bullying and harassment, suggested that adherence to policies had been affected detrimentally in that the organisation's processes had been complicated and made longer to follow.

Apart from these comments, three respondents mentioned that trainees were not convinced of their responsibility to deal with the topic area, suggesting the training had not been effective; four mentioned current organisational barriers to implementing the training (e.g. the agenda had been stalled, or employees and management felt too divided); one said their organisation "*did not start out on the right foot*" and suggested that it would be a lengthy process to recover from this; and one simply said that the training dealt with "*a daunting area*".

Broader organisational impacts

Specific positive and negative impacts

Respondents were asked about the impact that Workplace Training had had on a range of aspects of their organisations' practices, culture and capacity to manage employment relations and HR issues. Across the nine areas discussed, the most commonly noted positive organisational impact was in the organisation's overall

ability to deal effectively with the training topic area, which was mentioned by four-fifths (78 per cent) of all respondents.[10]

Also very common were positive impacts on the effectiveness and the timeliness with which employment relations issues were dealt with, which were noted by about two-thirds of respondents (effectiveness 69 per cent; timeliness 65 per cent).

Slightly less commonly reported were positive influences on each of the following: the fair treatment of employees (43 per cent); levels of trust between managers and employees (43 per cent); the ability to manage change in staff or HR issues (40 per cent); levels of trust between senior management and employee representatives (38 per cent); and staff morale (36 per cent).

Figure 3.11: Organisations reporting positive organisational impacts, by topic area
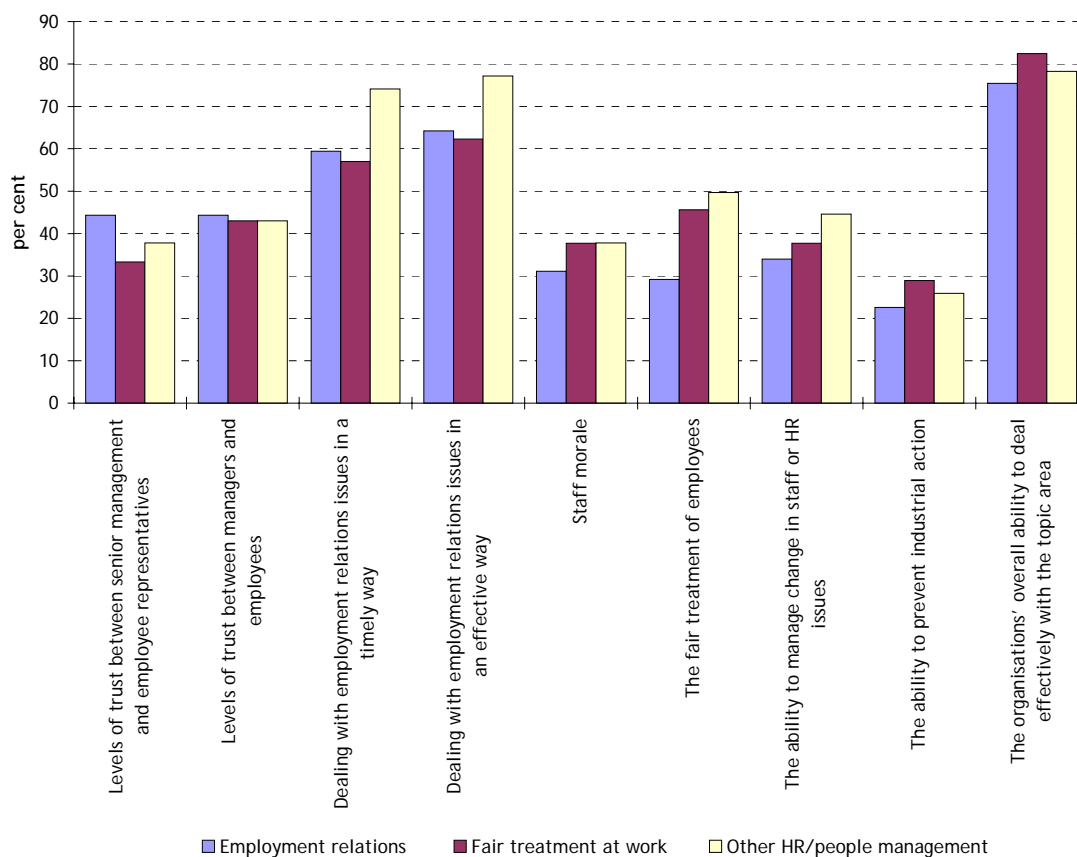
Note: Positive percentages combine ratings of 'slightly' and 'very positive'.
N=106 (Employment relations); 114 (Fair treatment); 193 (Other HR).
Source: IES, 2008

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[10] This figure includes both 'slightly' and 'very' positive impacts.

Workplace Training was least often seen to be influential on the organisation's ability to prevent industrial action (noted by 26 per cent of respondents). However, this reflects the relatively low incidence of industrial action and may also be due to the particular importance of extraneous variables beyond organisational practices (e.g. the need to make redundancies).

Figure 3.11 breaks these figures down by broad topic area. In general, as with the impact on participants, it appears that the ability of Workplace Training to improve organisational outcomes does not vary much by topic area. There were two exceptions to this. Firstly, training on HR and people management issues (not fair treatment) had a notably greater impact than other training on dealing with employment relations issues effectively and in a timely way. Specifically, 77 per cent of respondents who had training in this area noted positive outcomes in effectiveness and 74 per cent noted positive outcomes in timeliness, as opposed to 63 per cent and 58 per cent respectively for other training.

Secondly, training on employment relations issues was less likely to have a recognised positive impact on the fair treatment of employees. Here, 29 per cent of cases were noted to have had a positive impact, as opposed to 46 per cent for training on fair treatment at work and 50 per cent for training on other HR and people management issues. This reflects the different focus of training.

Table 3.7: Workplace Training impacts on employment relations and people management (row percentages)

Impact on:	Very positive %	Slightly positive %	No impact %	Slightly negative %	Very negative %	Don't know %
Levels of trust between senior management and employee representatives	11	26	40	1	0	21
Levels of trust between managers and employees	11	32	35	1	0	21
Dealing with employment relations issues in a timely way	29	36	19	1	0	15
Dealing with employment relations issues in an effective way	28	41	16	1	0	14
Staff morale	7	29	46	1	1	17
The fair treatment of employees	22	22	42	0	0	14
The ability to manage change in staff or HR issues	12	27	45	1	0	14
The ability to prevent industrial action	11	15	58	0	0	16
The organisation's overall ability to deal effectively with topic	33	45	7	1	0	14

N=418
Note: percentages may not total 100 due to rounding
Source: IES, 2008

Table 3.7 shows the results for all response categories in this set of questions. Two main observations can be made here. Firstly, it is interesting to note that on several of these indicators, large proportions of organisations reported no impact from the training. This can particularly be seen in the ability to prevent industrial

action (58 per cent of respondents), but also in staff morale (46 per cent of respondents), fair treatment of employees (42 per cent), the ability to manage change in HR (45 per cent) and levels of trust between senior management and employee representatives (40 per cent). Secondly, it is also noteworthy that there were substantial proportions of 'don't know' responses for these indicators. This is especially so for the impact of training on levels of trust (21 per cent for both questions on trust) but is also the case for its impact on staff morale (17 per cent) and all other indicators (14 to 16 per cent). Together, these findings highlight the difficulties in bringing about and measuring certain improvements. In short, they illustrate that the state of employment relations can be affected by many factors and is relatively low down the 'impact chain' of training; and that, even if they are genuinely affected, related concepts such as trust and morale can be difficult to define and measure.

As with the impacts on participants (see above), respondents who said that the training had impacted negatively upon the organisation were asked why this was so, their answers being recorded in verbatim. Out of the 38 negative results, there are only two that confirm that the negative impact was actually due to the training. Both these regard the effect of absence management training on staff morale: one respondent said that *"employees feel there is only a policy for managers to discipline them"*, and another said that their staff took absence management *"personally"*. Apart from these, almost all the comments clearly point to organisational barriers (N=22), or challenges in supporting or persuading staff to realise their responsibilities (N=10). Typical comments on organisational barriers included:

- "It was not implemented quickly enough after the training"
- "The establishment is not good at this in general"
- "Because of the redundancy issues"
- "The company was up for sale and whatever we did had a negative impact"

Typical comments on challenges in supporting and persuading staff included:

- "No one likes to do the bad elements of the job [employment relations]"
- "Not sure how much the consultation group is wanted"
- "They don't [manage change] because of confidence"
- "We need more training in other areas"
- "It was not implemented: we felt that we needed more training".

Changes to policies and procedures

Finally, respondents were asked whether they had changed their policies or procedures as a result of training: this had been done in 140 organisations (33 per cent of the total).

Interestingly, however, whether organisations made such changes bore little relation to whether they had originally intended to do so. Of these 140 organisations, only 20 (14 per cent) had actually set informing and developing

policies as a training objective; and in another 24 cases, informing and developing policies had been an objective but no changes were made following the training.[11] On the other hand, 30 per cent of all organisations changed their policies and procedures due to Workplace Training even though this had not been planned. As can be seen in Table 3.8, this was particularly common following training on fair treatment at work (37 per cent).

Table 3.8: Whether organisation changed policies or procedures as a result of Workplace Training, by topic area (row percentages)

| | | Change in policies or procedures | | | |
		Yes %	No %	Don't know %	N
Topic area	Employment relations*	28	69	4	105
	Fair treatment at work	37	57	6	108
	Other HR/people management	28	68	4	180
	Other	20	60	20	5
All cases		30	65	5	398

Note: Excludes cases in which changing policies was stated as an original driver for the training.
*Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.
Source: IES, 2008

Bottom-line impacts

One would not usually expect substantial bottom-line impacts from a brief training course, but making tangible improvements to outcomes in employment relations is central to Acas' mission, so even small changes would be of interest. Thus, we asked respondents about changes in six key areas of employment relations and HR in the time since training. Those who noted changes were then asked to what extent they attributed them to the Workplace Training.

As can be seen in Table 3.9, the proportions of organisations that had witnessed changes in the areas listed were modest. Changes (positive or negative) were noted by 19 per cent of respondents in the number of absence levels; 19 per cent in the number of grievances; 17 per cent in the number of disciplinaries; 15 per cent in staff turnover; and 13 per cent in productivity. Unsurprisingly, given the infrequency with which they occur, changes in the number of industrial disputes were rare, being noted in only 14 cases (three per cent).

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[11] Of the 44 cases in which developing policies had been a training objective, the majority (25) concerned training on HR and people management, 13 training on fair treatment, and 5 training on employment relations.

Table 3.9: Respondents reporting changes in key aspects of employment relations and HR since training (row percentages)

	Increased %	Stayed the same %	Decreased %	Don't know %
Number of grievances	11	60	8	21
Number of disciplinaries	10	63	7	20
Number of industrial disputes	1	77	2	20
Absence levels	6	61	14	20
Staff turnover	8	65	7	20
Productivity	13	64	0	23

N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Table 3.10: Whether changes in key aspects of employment relations and HR were due to training (row percentages)

	Due to Workplace Training:								
	Largely		Partially		Not at all		Don't know		N
Outcomes noted:	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	
Change in number of grievances*	13	10	33	26	54	43	0	0	79
Change in number of disciplinaries*	16	11	40	28	44	31	0	0	70
Reduction in number of industrial disputes	25	2	50	4	25	2	0	0	8
Reduction in absence levels	7	4	46	26	43	24	4	2	56
Reduction in staff turnover	0	0	30	8	67	18	4	1	27
Increase in productivity	4	1	58	32	36	19	2	1	53

*Positive or negative change (see Footnote 12).
Note: Care should be taken in interpreting percentages where cell counts are low.
Source: IES, 2008

In measuring the extent to which these changes were due to the Workplace Training, we isolated the desirable (positive or negative) outcomes that would point to the training being effective.[12] The main results, shown in Table 3.10, can be summarised as follows:

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[12] The desirable outcome is clearly an increase for productivity and decreases for industrial disputes, absence levels and staff turnover. However, for the number of grievances and disciplinaries, the picture is less clear. Although in and of itself, a

- Of the 79 respondents who noted a change in the number of grievances, just under half (46 per cent) attributed it at least in part to the Workplace Training. This is nine per cent of the total.

- Of the 53 respondents who noted an increase in productivity, three-fifths (62 per cent) attributed it at least in part to the Workplace Training. This is eight per cent of the total.

- Of the 56 respondents who noted a decrease in absence levels, about half (53 per cent) attributed it at least in part to the Workplace Training. This is seven per cent of the total.

Other findings are based on smaller numbers and are not likely to be reliable indications. Nonetheless, for indicative value, they show that of the eight respondents who noted a decrease in the number of industrial disputes, the majority (six) attributed it partly or largely to the Workplace Training; and of the 27 respondents who noted a decrease in staff turnover, eight attributed it in part to Workplace Training.

Table 3.11: Changes in key indicators partially or largely due to training by topic area (count)

| | Topic area | | | |
Outcomes noted:	Employment relations	Fair treatment at work	Other HR/people management	Total (N)
Change in number of grievances	5	10	20	35
Change in number of disciplinaries	4	4	31	39
Reduction in number of industrial disputes	2	1	3	6
Reduction in absence levels	2	5	22	29
Reduction in staff turnover	3	-	5	8
Increase in productivity	5	9	19	33

Source: IES, 2008

Finally, Table 3.11 breaks these figures down into broad topic areas. Care needs to be taken at this point with small cell counts[13], but there is one particularly interesting result. The four main findings from Table 3.10 (i.e. impacts on the

reduction in these would normally be considered good, organisations may be starting from a point where the prevalent culture is such that employees are afraid to raise grievances; or where managers shirk their responsibilities regarding disciplinaries. In such cases, Workplace Training would be effective if it led to increases in disciplinaries or grievances. We therefore left these changes to include increases and decreases.

[13] For this reason, we do not include percentages.

number of disciplinaries and grievances and levels of staff absence and productivity) seem to be largely explained by training that dealt with HR and people management issues (other than fair treatment). This is not surprising, as Workplace Training in this broad area incorporates training on discipline and grievance (a major area of Workplace Training), absence management and supervision and line management (which relate to individual staff performance). Nonetheless, the findings highlight that, for the 'bottom-line' measures considered, it is Workplace Training on HR and people management issues that yields the greatest returns.

3.5. Satisfaction and related outcomes

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the Workplace Training, how they rated its value for money, whether they would recommend it to others and whether they would be likely to use Acas training again. All of these can be seen as proxies for overall client satisfaction with the service.

General satisfaction levels were extremely high. Two-thirds of respondents (67 per cent) said they were very satisfied, and a further 28 per cent said they were satisfied. Overall, only ten respondents (two per cent) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. As can be seen in Table 3.12, the level of satisfaction was broadly comparable across the three main topic areas, although slightly higher than average for training on HR and people management issues (73 per cent saying they were very satisfied) and slightly lower with employment relations training (59 per cent).

Table 3.12: General level of satisfaction with Workplace Training, by topic area (column percentages)

	Topic area			
	Employment relations %	Fair treatment at work %	Other HR/people management %	Total %
Very satisfied	59	64	73	67
Satisfied	34	32	22	28
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	5	3	2	3
Dissatisfied	1	1	2	1
Very dissatisfied	0	1	2	1
N	105	114	192	416

Notes: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding; excludes 'don't know' responses.
Source: IES, 2008

The value for money ratings were also very positive (see Table 3.13). Over half of respondents (54 per cent) considered the Workplace Training they received to be very good value for money and a further one-third (33 per cent) said that it was good value. Only 15 respondents (four per cent) thought that the training was fairly poor or very poor value for money. This was fairly uniform across the three main topic areas.

Table 3.13: Opinion of value for money of Workplace Training by topic area (column percentages)

	Topic area			
Value for money	Employment relations %	Fair treatment at work %	Other HR/people management* %	Total %
Very good	53	50	56	54
Good	34	35	33	33
Average	10	9	8	9
Fairly poor	2	2	2	2
Very poor	1	4	2	2
N	101	101	182	389

Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.
Note: Excludes 'don't know' responses.
Source: IES, 2008

Notwithstanding this general satisfaction, responses to the final open question ("Is there anything else you would like to add…?") suggest that, for the relatively few respondents who did not feel the Workplace Training service was good value for money, the issue seemed to be of significant importance. Equally, other respondents said that, while the service might be good *value* for money, they nonetheless found its cost almost prohibitively high (the implicit or explicit suggestion being that the service might be subsidised in some way). Comments included:

> "We picked you because you were such good value for money, but your increase in prices means that you are now at the same level as others. If the prices go up much more we would consider looking elsewhere."

> "We are only a small college and would like to undertake more training but the next course is double the price and that amount of money is a huge chunk out of our budget."

> "We think the training is very good but it is a shame that the government does not still fund it. As we are a charity we have to raise the funds ourselves for this training and that sometimes can be difficult."

Almost all respondents (97 per cent) said they would recommend Acas Workplace Training on this topic to other organisations. The majority also envisaged their organisations using Acas training in the future (see Table 3.14). Specifically, two-thirds of respondents (68 per cent) thought they would be very likely to use Acas for further training; and a further quarter (25 per cent) thought that they would be fairly likely to do so. Again, this was fairly uniform across the three main topic areas.

Table 3.14: Perceived likelihood of using Acas Workplace Training again, by topic area (column percentages)

	Topic area			
	Employment relations %	Fair treatment at work %	Other HR/people management %	Total %
Very likely	63	71	69	68
Fairly likely	24	26	24	25
Neither likely nor unlikely	7	0	1	2
Fairly unlikely	1	1	1	1
Very unlikely	5	3	5	4
N	104	112	193	414

Note: Excludes 'don't know' responses.
Source: IES, 2008

3.6. Factors influencing training outcomes

The tables and graphs above give us a good idea of overall trends in training outcomes, including how they vary by topic area. However, they do not indicate whether apparent relationships are statistically significant and remain so when controlling for other key variables. To address this, we carried out analysis to measure the respective influences of a range of variables on levels of satisfaction with Workplace Training and the extent to which the training objectives were achieved.[14]

In both of these analyses, we considered the influence of the following factors (independent variables):

● The main (one or two) objectives of the training.

● The topic area (grouped as employment relations, fair treatment at work, and other HR/people management).

● Whether or not managers, trade union representatives, non-union staff representatives and HR staff were involved in tailoring the training.

● Whether the training was compulsory or not.

● The attendance of the training by trade union representatives and non-trade union representatives.

● The drivers for commissioning the training (e.g. whether organisations had needed help with a recognised problem).

● Whether or not the organisation had had an Acas Workplace Project.

[14] In each analysis, we used binary logistic regression, a common statistical technique for studying the relationship between multiple variables. The method and results are described in more detail in Appendix 2, Section 4.

- The size of organisation (number of employees).

- The number of months since the training had finished.

For the analysis on satisfaction levels, we also considered the following variables:

- Whether or not respondents noted positive impacts from the training in nine key aspects of employment relations and people management.

- Whether or not organisations changed policies or procedures as a result of the training.

- Whether or not respondents considered that the training objectives had been completely achieved.

Factors affecting client satisfaction

In the first analysis, we looked at influences on whether or not respondents said they were 'very satisfied' with the Workplace Training service (see Section 3.5). As anticipated, the achievement of objectives was found to be the main factor positively affecting satisfaction. Controlling for other factors, respondents who reported that their main training objectives had been 'completely achieved' were five times more likely to be very satisfied with the training than those who did not. Whether or not respondents perceived the training to be very good value for money was also found to be a strong predictor of satisfaction — respondents who rated the training as 'very good' value for money being four times more likely than others to be very satisfied.

Levels of satisfaction were found to be significantly influenced by just two of the nine specific positive and negative organisational impacts respondents were asked about (see Section 3.4). These were improved levels of trust between managers and employees and dealing with employment relations issues in a more timely way, both of which doubled the likelihood of respondents being very satisfied.

Training topic also had some influence on satisfaction levels. Specifically, for training on HR and people management issues[15], the chances of respondents being very satisfied were double those for training on employment relations issues. This is in line with the findings of Table 3.12. Controlling for other factors, there was found to be no significant difference between the likelihood of training on fair treatment at work and training on employment relations leading to highly satisfied customers.

Factors affecting achievement of objectives

In the second analysis, we looked at influences on whether or not respondents reported that the main training objectives had been 'completely achieved' (see Section 3.3). By this measure, only four of the factors we considered were found to significantly influence the achievement of objectives, the success rate being fairly standard across the board in most aspects of the training.

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[15] Other than fair treatment at work.

Firstly, controlling for other variables, the involvement of the HR function in tailoring Workplace Training increased the odds of completely achieving objectives by a factor of 2.5. This suggests that when organisations draw upon their HR expertise to tailor the training, they more than double their chances of it being highly successful. However, caution should be taken in interpreting this finding. As mentioned above (see Section 3.2), the variable used is composite, derived from the responses that (a) people other than management and employee representatives were involved and (b) these 'others' were HR or related staff. In short, not all respondents were explicitly asked whether their HR functions had helped tailor the training. As a result, the reliability of this variable can be called into question.

Thus, for example, it may be that what appears to be an indication of HR staff being involved in the tailoring process is in fact a proxy for the HR function being more *actively* involved in tailoring the training. In this case, the variable would be picking up on the degree of tailoring that took place, more than whether it took place at all.[16]

The analysis shows that two objectives[17] had a significant negative effect on the likelihood of training success, namely: improving organisational performance, which reduced the likelihood of completely achieving objectives by 55 per cent; and improving employment relations, which reduced the likelihood by 45 per cent. In other words, controlling for other factors, organisations for whom these were main objectives were roughly half as likely to completely achieve them than were organisations with other main objectives. These results are not surprising, as organisational performance and employment relations are susceptible to a great range of factors and are particularly hard to improve. Thus, this finding is probably best explained by the fact that objectives that are less focused and/or less realistic tend to be more difficult to achieve.

Finally, and most likely related to this, contracting Workplace Training as part of a wider project also diminished the likelihood of success, reducing the odds of completely achieving objectives by a factor of 0.63. The most likely explanation for this result is that the training objectives supported and related to the broader programme, which was more ambitious and also influenced by other factors. Again, it is likely that this is a reflection of unclear or unrealistic objectives.

Controlling for other factors, the length of time since training was not found to significantly influence whether its objectives had been met.

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[16] The implications of this for the questionnaire design are discussed in Appendix 2.

[17] Here, 'objectives' refer to those identified as being among the *one or two main objectives* of the training.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. The attraction and usage of Acas Workplace Training

The greatest driver behind the decision to commission Workplace Training was that organisations recognised they needed help to improve in specific areas of employment relations or people management. Two-thirds of respondents noted this as a reason for the training and half cited it as the most important reason. Training was commissioned to resolve problems and improve capacity in a wide range of issues, which most notably included discipline and grievance, equality and diversity, and information and consultation.

In the great majority of cases, the training did not seem to have been contentious, at least for those who attended it: four out of five respondents said that staff had been 'generally in favour' of the underlying message of the training. This would suggest that the benefit of the training as it is currently used lies mainly in building capacity through improved understanding and techniques, rather than persuading staff to fundamentally change their approach or values. Indeed, some comments suggested that attempting to change deep-rooted views and behaviours may be over ambitious in a relatively short training course. For example, one respondent said that training on information and consultation had failed to have a positive impact, because "*I'm not sure how much the consultation group is wanted*".

Acas was chosen as a training provider for a variety of reasons. The most important of these would seem to be the quality of expertise at Acas' disposal and the general quality of their training products. Others included being able to liaise with trainers and tailor training to specific organisational needs; the impartiality that Acas represents between management and employee concerns; and even the fact that Acas offices are local.

It is worth noting that the single most common reason given as to why organisations turned to Acas for their training needs was that they had good experience of working with Acas in the past (cited by half of all respondents). Having healthy numbers of repeat customers invariably testifies to good quality services, but in the case of Acas, it is also likely to be an indication that certain employers fundamentally 'buy in' to its approach and values (e.g. social dialogue at work). Either way, the fact that at least half of respondents were return customers suggests that Acas has a loyal client base.

In so far as they evidence a loyal client base, high levels of repeat custom reinforce the importance of maintaining high quality services and good client relationships. However, it also seems likely that the levels of repeat custom are indicative of low general awareness among potential clients of the service. Specifically, Acas are probably not best known for their Workplace Training and many organisations may only come to hear of it through receiving other Acas services, such as collective conciliation. This hypothesis is supported by several responses to the final open question ("Is there anything else you would like to add…?"), which stated that prior awareness had been low and suggested that Acas should promote these activities more.

Tailoring Workplace Training to the organisation

The survey findings confirmed the option of tailoring training to organisational needs as a key element of Workplace Training. It was cited by a number of respondents as a reason for choosing Acas over other training providers; where it worked well, it was sometimes recognised to be a main factor affecting satisfaction with the training; and in the relatively few cases where clients were not satisfied with the training, a key factor often seems to have been its failure.

However, our findings suggest that in practice, the process of tailoring Workplace Training may deviate significantly from how it is officially prescribed in Acas policy guidance.[18] According to the latter, Acas training has traditionally been developed as a matter of course with the involvement of staff representatives and/or trade unions. The findings of this survey paint rather a different picture: trade union representatives were said to be involved in developing the training in only one in eight, and staff representatives in a quarter of all organisations surveyed.

The non-involvement of staff representatives does not reflect Acas' ambition to involve both sides, but rather the readiness of either party to meet Acas' request for joint involvement. Furthermore, it may be that when staff representatives are involved in tailoring, this often occurs more indirectly — and thus less visibly — than one might expect, through internal discussions to which Acas are not party. In either case, our analyses found that whether staff representatives were involved in tailoring the training was found to have no significant impact on the achievement of objectives. By contrast, the involvement of HR and related staff appeared to have a strong significant positive impact on the likelihood of objectives being fully achieved.

It would be reasonable to conclude that, while tailoring Workplace Training to the organisation is important for its success, there is no single best way of doing this and each organisation may approach it differently. Thus, it may well be that the best way to tailor training is to focus on involving the most *relevant* staff for that training area. These may be trade union representatives, but equally may be HR managers or others attached to the HR function, such as diversity champions or occupational health professionals.

4.2. Success of Workplace Training

Overall degree of success

A reliable gauge of the success of Workplace Training would necessitate meaningful comparators, such as evaluations of similar training services or other Acas services. Nonetheless, it is clear from the current survey findings that the overall satisfaction rates are extremely positive, with two-thirds of respondents saying that they were very satisfied with the service, 97 per cent saying they would recommend it to others, and two-thirds saying they were 'very likely' to use it again themselves (see Section 3.5). Furthermore, the great majority of respondents felt that the training had had positive impacts on what was

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[18] Acas policy guidance on tailoring Workplace Training is outlined in Section 2.2.

commonly seen as the most important training objective, viz. improving participants' knowledge and behaviour (see Section 3.4).

The strongest predictor of client satisfaction was the achievement of main training objectives, for which the survey results were also very positive: half of the respondents reported having completely achieved their training objectives and almost half said that they had been partially achieved (see Section 3.3). This includes respondents whose main objectives may have been too vague and too ambitious for a relatively short training programme. As the analysis on factors affecting outcomes demonstrates, if improving organisational performance and improving employment relations were prominent training objectives, the likelihood of the objectives being achieved roughly halved. Thus, one way in which Acas might improve the success rate of its training is to focus clients' attention on objectives that are the most realistic and specific.

Relative strengths and weakness

The main comparison we made in analysing the findings was across three broad training topic areas. Controlling for other factors, we found no significant variance in the achievement of objectives across these topic areas. This suggests that the effectiveness of training across these areas is fairly uniform and confirms that it is appropriate for Acas to provide training courses in all the broad subject areas that it currently offers.

However, there was a relationship between training topic and satisfaction, with clients who had commissioned Workplace Training on HR and people management issues (e.g. discipline and grievance) being twice as likely to be very satisfied as those who had commissioned training on employment relations issues. While the reason for this apparent discrepancy is not entirely clear, one possible explanation is that clients find that HR and people management training is more directly useful, or practically applicable.

This hypothesis is given credence by analysis of the differences in specific impacts from training in different topic areas. Firstly, the impact of Workplace Training on employment relations issues was less likely than other training to improve participants' adherence to policies and procedures. Secondly and — in the case of line managers — related to this, employment relations training was less likely to lead to observed improvements in the fair treatment of employees. Thirdly, training on HR and people management issues (except fair treatment) had the greatest impact on dealing with employment relations issues in a timely way. Each of these findings relate to practical outcomes that may be less salient to employment relations than for issues in HR and people management, but nonetheless would certainly be considered desirable. However, the importance of these findings should not be overstated: with the exception of these findings, the impacts of training on participants and organisations were similar across the three broad training topics.

Finally, it should be noted that the groupings we used for training topics comprised three fairly crude categories that doubtless conflate quite different training courses (see Section 3.2). This was a necessary action, given the relatively small size of the data set and the wealth of specific training topics. However, by aggregating this data set with those of future surveys, it may be possible to investigate more detailed breakdowns of training topic.

Level of training impact

The impacts of Workplace Training measured at an organisational level were generally smaller than those measured at the level of the individual: for example, three-quarters of respondents said that trainees' adherence to policies and procedures had improved, while only two-fifths noted organisation-level improvements in the fair treatment of employees and the ability to manage staff and HR issues. These results might appear to lend some support to the basic Kirkpatrick model, which states that the effects of training take time to feed through to more macro levels (see Section 2.1). However, in the one area where we can compare like with like, the results were much more similar: while 83 per cent of respondents noted a positive impact on trainees' ability to deal with the topic area effectively, 78 per cent noted the same improvement at an organisational level.

Furthermore, the length of time since the training was not found to have any significant impact on the success of the training, either in terms of achievement of objectives or satisfaction. This is not to say that such a relationship does not exist: it may be that more complex analysis is required, to allow for the fact that, while one type of training effect may take time to bed in, another may fade with time. Alternatively, it may simply be the case that more data is required in order to detect differences over time (particularly in areas where impacts were rarely observed).

Finally, the fact that such a large proportion of organisations (30 per cent of the total) changed their policies and procedures due to Workplace Training without having planned to do so before the training gives some insight into the nature of the commissioning process. The most likely reason for this finding would seem to be that some organisations contract Workplace Training primarily with a view to improving their staff's skills and understanding, but realise through the training that improvement in the topic area cannot be achieved by this alone and needs renewed policies and procedures to be properly supported. Put slightly differently, it appears that training is often commissioned in order to improve the knowledge of individual staff, but the training highlights that organisational knowledge is equally lacking. It is interesting to note that this was particularly common following training on fair treatment at work.

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODS

Population and sampling

Population

The two potential populations identified were the main commissioning contacts or 'Lead Customer Managers' (as identified in Acas management information); and training course delegates. We surveyed the former of these for various reasons. Firstly, main commissioning contacts were the people most likely to be able to gauge the medium– to long-term organisational impacts of Workplace Training. A proportion were likely to work in an HR function and as such, would be experts in evaluating the impact of training on the behaviour of individuals and changes to wider systems, processes and the organisational culture and employment relations climate. Delegates, on the other hand, were less likely to have an overview of organisational impacts and might find it difficult to distinguish between the organisational impacts and the impacts on themselves as individuals.

Another, more practical reason was that Acas has workable contact details for 'Lead Customer Managers', but not for all delegates. We could realistically expect a good or very good response rate from a survey of main commissioning contacts, as they were named contacts who already have working relationships with Acas. By contrast, for various reasons, the risk of an insufficient response rate in a survey of delegates would be high. In particular, employers would likely feel constrained by the Data Protection Act and be unwilling to give contact details of their employees to a third party, even one sanctioned by Acas. Employers might not wish to give out these details without obtaining permission from the individuals, which would cost them time and thus make them less likely to participate at all.

Another factor was that delegates would need to be recruited through the main contact, who was likely to be the main commissioning contact. Considering that much of the work of a telephone survey is in contacting target respondents and obtaining their participation, it made sense, if contacting the main commissioning contacts, to also interview them. However, main commissioning contacts would be less likely to participate in the research if asked for co-operation in two areas (their own response in a survey and the contact details for delegates) than if they are asked only for their own response in a 15-20 minute interview. In short, the best response rate could be expected from interviewing main commissioning contacts alone.

Sample

Sample definition

Organisations were selected that had completed a Workplace Training course 3–15 months before the time of interviewing. A three-month time lag was judged to give sufficient opportunity for early impacts to emerge and the opportunity to pick up turbulence in the employment relations climate for organisations which were confronting challenges associated with change. It was decided that, at 15 months post-intervention, we could reasonably expect to see the cumulative and optimal impact of training on the organisation, while also being confident that the training

topic still held some currency for the organisation. This strategy was designed to allow measurement of the development of training impact over time.

Although some training surveys (e.g. the National Adult Learner Survey) ask respondents about training they have had three years previously or even longer ago, there was a risk that organisations that completed Workplace Training two or three years ago may have 'moved on' and the issues for which they commissioned Acas have become less salient. Also, the less recent the intervention, the less likely the management information would be up to date and the greater the chance that target respondents would not participate. It was thus decided not to extend the sample frame beyond 15 months post intervention.

Organisations that had received more than one Workplace Training course on more than one topic in the given timeframe were considered 'duplicate organisations' and were surveyed only once about one of these courses. The main reasoning behind this was that surveying organisations on more than one training topic would require extended or duplicate interviews. This might be overly burdensome on the organisations concerned and detrimental to response rates.

Organisations having undertaken multiple Workplace Training courses on the same topic (e.g. for different groups of staff) in the given timeframe were surveyed about the overall impact of that training programme on the organisation. An organisation-wide programme of Workplace Training on a single topic was thus treated as a single unit of analysis. Notwithstanding this, there were a small number of organisations that had commissioned very large numbers of Workplace Training courses on the same topic ('National Programmes'). As an anomaly, it was decided to remove these organisations from the sample.

Sample size and selection

An entire population sample was selected (i.e. all eligible organisations that had completed Workplace Training within the agreed timeframe); the sample was not stratified. In setting the post-intervention timeframe, we made a rough power calculation, considering the number of achieved responses and the overall sample size that was necessary to carry out the desired analysis. It was estimated that a 12-month timeframe would provide a sample of 800 to 900 distinct (i.e. not duplicated) eligible clients, from which a respectable response rate would generate 400 to 500 responses.

As mentioned above, this timeframe also considered what time period would allow us to investigate the relationship between impact and length of time since training; and how long after Workplace Training target respondents would be able and willing to discuss its impact.

Maximising response rates

Despite the general decline of response rates in social research, it was thought reasonable to expect a good response from main commissioning contacts, as they were named contacts who had an interest in the quality of Acas services. Nonetheless, a number of steps were taken to ensure decent levels of response, including the following:

- Contacting target respondents by letter approximately a week before they were first telephoned to prime them.

- Using telephone interviews instead of self-completion questionnaires.

- Limiting the interview to 20 minutes.

- Using skilled and experienced telephone researchers to contact and interview target respondents.

- Mentioning Acas when telephoning target respondents.

- Explaining the purpose and value of the survey.

- Outlining, both in the pre-telephone letter and at the interview, how the data would be used and how anonymity and confidentiality would be protected.

- Re-attempting to interview target respondents up to seven times as necessary (except when there was a straight refusal to participate).

It was decided not to provide financial incentives for participation in the research, as the value for doing so with this target population was not thought likely to be worthwhile.

Development of research materials

Pre-telephone letter

A letter was sent to each main commissioning contact as identified from the management information. Letters were sent in batches to arrive one or two weeks before the research team first attempted to contact the recipients. The letter did the following:

- Explained the aims and methods of the project.

- Mentioned Acas and included the Acas logo.

- Confirmed main commissioning contacts' telephone numbers.

- Clarified that the target respondent was the person best placed to judge the organisational impact of the Workplace Training.

- Included a return form for main commissioning contacts to give details of the most appropriate person to contact if it was not themselves.

- Provided a contact at IES, in case they wished to discuss the research or amend an incorrect telephone number.

Questionnaire design

The final interview schedule can be seen in Appendix 3. The questionnaire was designed by IES in partnership with Acas and Employment Research. Specifically, general areas of questioning were agreed with Acas at an initial set-up meeting; the interview schedule was piloted by Employment Research; and Acas and Employment Research provided comments and suggested amendments to draft versions of the interview schedule before and after the piloting stage.

SURVEY PILOT

The primary aim of the pilot was to ensure that questions were clear, meaningful and answerable and, where they were not, to understand how they might be

improved. A secondary aim was to gauge how achievable a response rate of 60 per cent was under the proposed research design.

The pilot was conducted as follows. Pre-telephone letters were sent to 20 main commissioning contacts. Employment Research interviewers telephoned them two or three days later, explaining the research and if possible, conducting the interview or arranging a time to do so. As with the survey interviews, if the main commissioning contact was not the most appropriate person to interview, the interviewer would ask for the contact details of the person who was. If necessary, interviewers rang organisations back up to eight times to get through to the most appropriate person for interview.

Interview question areas

The following areas were included in the interview schedule. Some of the outcomes used were 'hard' and measurable and for others we gauged the views of respondents.

BACKGROUND AND FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT IMPACT OF TRAINING:

- Why they chose Acas as training provider.
- Whether the organisation measured the impact of Workplace Training, and if so, what the results were.
- Who was involved in tailoring the Workplace Training to the organisation.
- Whether the Workplace Training was part of a wider project.
- What the objectives of the training were.
- Who the training was open to and whether it was generally mandatory.
- Receptiveness of delegates to the message of the training.

'INTERMEDIATE' OUTCOMES:

- Participants' understanding of the issues covered by Workplace Training.
- Participants' awareness of any relevant responsibilities and rights.
- Participants' adherence to employment policies.
- Participants' confidence and ability to manage issues covered by training.
- Timeliness with which issues are addressed, i.e. preventing or resolving employment relations issues.
- Levels of trust between management and employees.
- Fair treatment of employees.
- Propensity of staff to report grievances/bullying etc.

'FINAL' ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES:

- Ability to manage change in staff issues.
- Quality of employment relations before and after training.
- Absence levels.
- Number of industrial disputes.

- Threat of industrial action.

- Productivity.

OTHER QUESTIONS:

- To what extent the course achieved its objectives.

- To what extent the organisation received value for money.

- How satisfied clients were with the service.

- Whether respondents would recommend Acas training.

Survey interviewing

We used telephone interviews, which yield a higher response rate than a survey using self-completion questionnaires. Telephone contact was the surest and most straightforward way of ensuring that respondents were the most appropriate person to discuss organisational impacts of the training. In a self-completion survey, a cover letter could ask the recipient to forward the questionnaire to the most appropriate person if it is not her/himself, but this approach requires significant initiative from the main contact (and possibly other staff) and thus risks the questionnaire not reaching the desired person.

As noted above, target respondents were contacted by letter approximately one week before being telephoned. IES selected the sample and sent out letters to target respondents in batches. IES provided Employment Research with the contact details of target respondents and key details (e.g. course topic) to be confirmed with them. All details of target respondents were kept confidential within IES and Employment Research.

Employment Research staff skilled and experienced in telephone interviewing carried out the telephone interviews. Before proceeding to the interview, it was confirmed with each contact that he/she was the main commissioning contact for the Workplace Training event in question: that is, the most appropriate person to discuss the organisational impacts of the training. Telephone interviews were designed to last a maximum of 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted from the end of November 2007 to late January 2008, with a break from 21 December to 7 January.

APPENDIX 2: TECHNICAL FINDINGS

This appendix presents the key areas of methodological findings from the survey. Although it mainly focuses on challenges and recommendations for future Acas research, it also covers aspects of the research that may be identified as particular strengths.

1. Questionnaire design

This section discusses issues that arose in the questionnaire design. The actual questionnaire used is shown in Appendix 3.

Reasons for training

Question 4 on the reasons for commissioning the training may have been difficult to answer for some respondents: firstly, because of difficulties recalling the reasons behind a decision that could have been made well over a year ago; and secondly, due to interference in respondents' minds from how the training was seen to have influenced the organisation. A more reliable measure would be likely if it were made prior to the training and included in the survey analysis as pre-existing management information.

Training objectives

The extent to which main training objectives were achieved was the most important factor predicting client satisfaction and is the clearest single indicator of training success. It is based on respondents selecting "which one or two" of a given list of objectives they saw "as being most important for the training".

A more typical method for measurement would be to ask which single objective was most important, which would give a straightforward categorical variable. By contrast, our approach of allowing two choices necessitates a series of (in this case eight) dummy variables. Nonetheless, this approach was chosen on the grounds that it should allow for dual training objectives and thus be a more valid measure.

As with questions on the reasons of training, it may be more reliable to measure objectives before the training takes place and incorporate it as management information, rather than asking about them in retrospect.

Persons involved in tailoring the training

As mentioned in Sections 3.2 and 3.6, there is evidence to suggest that the question on who was involved in tailoring the training to the organisation was weak. Specifically, two recommendations can be made for future surveys. Firstly, questions on who was involved in this process should include the HR function, as well as management and employee representatives. Secondly, bearing in mind the lack of clarity from the survey findings on how tailoring influences training outcomes (Section 3.6), it may be beneficial to ask about the *degree* of tailoring that is considered to have taken place, as well as who was involved.

'Negative' impact measurement

In measuring the impact of the training on specific aspects of employment relations, people management and participants' learning and behaviour, we used a Likert scale to allow for the possibility of negative as well as positive training impacts. However, analysis of the reasons given for negative responses suggests that the negative side of the scale is not a reliable measure.[19] Of the relatively few people who said that the training had impacted 'negatively' or 'very negatively' on the participants or the organisation, the majority appeared to have been voicing their frustration at other (e.g. organisational) barriers, rather than criticising the effectiveness of the training. In short, they conflated difficulties experienced implementing the training with the training having a negative impact.

There does not seem to be a single ideal solution to this problem. An alternative, probably more reliable response scale would record the degree of positive impact, from zero upwards. However, the possibility still remains that the training is actually seen to impact negatively on the organisation and/or its participants, for example, by confusing or generating fear of dealing with an employment relations matter. In the current survey, this was the case in a handful of cases.

In future surveys, it may be worth using two separate sets of questions: firstly, to enquire about positive impact, using a more reliable response scale running from zero upwards; and secondly, to ask explicitly whether the training itself, or the fact of it being commissioned had any negative impact. If practical problems running the training or barriers implementing the training are of interest, this could be investigated in a third area of questions.

2. Sampling and recruitment

Eligible population

Some respondents explained that their organisation aimed to pass on the training to other organisations and others simply arranged the training for others. Where possible, these cases were removed from the sample prior to the interview taking place (N=5). In future surveys, it may well be worth explicitly asking potential respondents whether they commissioned the training in order to directly benefit their own employment relations and people management, or those of other organisations. Once identified, these cases may then either be removed from the survey or asked alternative questions to those on organisational impacts.

Acas management information

There were two main challenges in using management information in this survey. One was that the timeframe of training straddled a major change in its format. This included a move from recording the contact details of various people involved in the training (including participants) to identifying a single Lead Customer Manager.

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[19] When interviewees gave negative responses to these questions, they were asked why this was the case and their answers were recorded in verbatim.

The other challenge regarded the general level of accuracy and completeness of the data. For some organisations, telephone numbers had to be obtained independently (e.g. through directory enquiries or company websites). We would estimate that this took a day. Further, inaccurate or out-of-date management information proved a major challenge in achieving responses, and efforts needed to be redoubled to meet the response target. However, this was less of an issue with the newer format of management information and future surveys of Workplace Training may therefore find it easier to achieve a decent response rate. Finally, inconsistencies in the way the training topic was recorded meant that these had to be individually recoded (see below).

Survey response

Four hundred and eighteen interviews were successfully conducted, each with a different organisation. This is 57 per cent of the 734 organisations for which contact details were provided by Acas (see Table A2.1). However, in order to obtain an idea of the degree of unknown error and response bias in a survey, the response rate should be adjusted to take into consideration 'dead' samples of people who were either not contactable or ineligible, which in this case formed a substantial proportion of the target population.

There are various reasons for 'dead' sample. Firstly, although an attempt had been made to remove all duplicate organisations from the sample, some duplicates remained, only to be uncovered at interview (N=48). This may well be due to complications in dealing with management information in two formats ('old' and 'new'). Secondly, a proportion of organisations could not be contacted because neither Acas' management information nor further enquiry provided a live telephone number (N=30). Similarly, there were 82 cases where no contact was made because there was no answer for the telephone numbers given, or only an answer machine[20], or someone (e.g. a receptionist) who could offer no help. In a further 42 cases, it was not possible to locate an appropriate interviewee, because those involved in organising the training had left the organisation, or had relocated due to organisation restructuring and could not be contacted; and because no one else contacted was able to discuss the training. There were also eight contacts that were not used due to an oversight in the research team. Finally, a few cases of Workplace Training (N=5) had been organised by a third party (e.g. a locally based association or training provider) for a conglomerate of small or micro organisations (e.g. a group of veterinary surgeons). These cases were excluded on the grounds that the training impact could not be reliably measured by the third party, the only organisation for which we had contact details and consent to approach. Adjusting for all these factors gives a revised population of 519 and an adjusted response rate of 81 per cent (see Table A2.1).

There is no universal consensus on the calculation of response rates and practices vary considerably (Lynn et al, 2001; Ramirez et al, 2000). However, the above calculation of an adjusted response rate is broadly in line with what the Institute for Social and Economic Research proposes as a 'co-operation rate' for face-to-

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[20] Standard practice for telephone survey interviewing is not to leave any messages on answer machines.

face interviews. The co-operation rate is described as "the number of achieved interviews as a proportion of those ever contacted during the fieldwork period" (Lynn et al, 2001: 31). Its calculation excludes cases not contacted, cases known to be ineligible and cases of unknown eligibility that are estimated to be ineligible.

Table A2.1: Response information (column percentages)

Result	Reason no interview	N	Sample %	Valid %
Completed interview		418	57	81
Refusal	Company policy	4	1	1
	Already interviewed by Acas	3	0	1
	No time	12	2	2
	No reason given	1	0	0
	Repeatedly unavailable (up to 8 times)*	81	11	16
Ineligible	Duplicate organisation	48	7	-
	Third party organising training for other organisations	5	1	-
Not contacted	Dead telephone number or fax number	30	4	-
	Could not establish telephone contact**	82	11	-
	No one able to discuss training***	42	6	-
	Reason unclear	8	1	-
Total		734	734	519

e.g. Target respondents who repeatedly asked the interviewer to 'phone back another day.
*** Live telephone line, but no answer or only an answer phone, or a receptionist who could offer no assistance.*
**** Target respondents had left the organisation, or had moved within the organisation and were not contactable.*
Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.
Source: IES, 2008

An adjusted response rate of 81 per cent indicates that the potential for response bias is small. It compares favourably to most telephone survey response rates, even where the study group may be considered to have a vested interest in the research, such as customers of a service.

Nonetheless, with 19 per cent non-response, some respondent bias remains a possibility. Although it is impossible to accurately predict the direction of such bias, it is likely that customers with more extreme (positive or negative) views of the training would be more likely to respond than those with muted views. It is also possible that people who held the training in positive regard would be more likely to respond than those who felt generally displeased with it.

Finally, there was some initial concern that the response rate might be poor among target respondents who completed training a year or more previously. However, the results show a decent spread of recency of the training. This enabled us to get a good sense of whether or not the impacts of Workplace Training vary significantly over the 12 month period (three to 15 months) after the training takes place.

3. Processing of results

Training Topic

The training topics listed in the Acas MI were checked with respondents during the interview and sometimes revised slightly or corrected as a result. We took the reported topic to be more accurate than that listed in the management information and used it as the main topic variable.

Training topics were grouped at two levels. Firstly, from an initial list of over 40 topics, slight variations of topic names were collapsed into single values: for example, 'ABC of Supervising' and 'Essentials of Supervision' were subsumed within 'Supervision'; and 'Managing Attendance' and 'Absence Management' were collapsed.

Secondly, for the sake of further analysis, we then grouped these collapsed topic names into three broad topic areas, namely 'Employment Relations', 'Fair Treatment at Work', and 'Other HR and People Management'. The few not covered by these were listed as 'Other' (see Table A2.2).

Table A2.2: Composition of respondent topic areas (row percentages) and break-down into subjects

	N	%		N	%		N	%
EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS	106	25.4	**FAIR TREATMENT AT WORK**	114	27.3	**OTHER HR/PEOPLE MANAGEMENT**	193	46.2
Employment Law	17	4.1	**Age Discrimination:**			**Discipline & Grievance (inc. investigations):**		
Information & Consultation:			Age Discrimination	24	5.7	Discipline & Grievance	91	21.8
Information & Consultation	43	10.3	Age Discrimination/Disability Discrimination	1	0.2	Investigations	15	3.6
Employee Forum	1	0.2	Age Discrimination/Discipline & Grievance	1	0.2	Hearings and Investigations	1	0.2
Works Council Training	2	0.5	**Bullying & Harassment**	30	7.2	Companion Representatives	1	0.2
Negotiation & Collective Bargaining:			**Equality & Diversity:**			Grievance to Appeal	1	0.2
Collective Bargaining	1	0.2	Equality & Diversity	56	13.4	**Employing People/Recruitment:**		
Consultation and Negotiation	29	6.9	Equal Opportunities	1	0.2	Employing People (recruitment & selection)	17	4.1
Trade Union Full-time Officials Briefing	1	0.2	Equal Pay	1	0.2	Written statements/contracts	2	0.5
Working in Partnership	1	0.2				**Having Difficult Conversations:**		
Employment Relations	1	0.2				Having Difficult Conversations	17	4.1
Industrial Relations	1	0.2				Difficult Situations	2	0.5
Redundancy/TUPE:						**Managing Absence & Attendance:**		
Redundancy/Redundancy Consultation	8	1.9				Absence Management	1	0.2
TUPE	1	0.2				Managing Attendance	16	3.8
						Stress Management	2	0.5
						Mediation	9	2.2
						Supervision/Line management:		
						Supervision	11	2.6
						Essential Skills for Supervisors/Team Leaders	1	0.2
						Staff Appraisal	2	0.5
						Managing Performance	1	0.2
						Management Skills	1	0.2
						People Handling	1	0.2
						Team Building	1	0.2

Table A2.2 continued

	N	%
OTHER TOPICS	**5**	**1.2**
Conflict Management	2	0.5
ACAS Model workplace	1	0.2
Passport to Safety	1	0.2
Review of Policies and Procedures	1	0.2

Source: IES, 2008

A few courses had been run on two topic areas (e.g. 'Age Discrimination/Disability Discrimination'; and 'Age Discrimination/Discipline & Grievance'). In these cases, we took the first topic listed to be the main area of training.

4. Data analysis

In each binary logistic regression, all independent variables that were not significant at p=0.05 were removed from the equation one by one, the least significant being removed first. The explanatory variables used to build the model were as follows:

● The main objectives of the training. In order to have a clear variable able to capture the main objectives, a set of dummy variables was created based on those who indicated each objective listed as being among the one or two most important objectives for the training.

● The topic area (grouped as employment relations, fair treatment at work, and other HR/people management) was included in the analysis to investigate links between the contents of training and outcomes.

● Whether certain groups of people at the organisation were involved in tailoring the training was included as a series of dummy variables, to investigate whether different expertise embedded in *ad hoc* training influenced the likelihood of success. The people covered were managers, trade union representatives, other staff representatives and HR staff. The variable for HR staff involvement is different from the others, in that the specific information was unprompted. All respondents were asked explicitly whether the other groups of people were involved, but not HR staff, which originally was taken for granted. However, all respondents were asked if 'anyone else' was involved, at which point some said HR or related staff.

● As a proxy for the general attitude or level of commitment of employees to training, a dummy variable was included indicating whether the training was compulsory or not.

● The attendance of the training by trade union representatives and non-trade union representatives were included as dummy variables.

● The drivers for commissioning the training were also included as dummy variables essential factors (e.g. whether organisations had been seeking help with an organisational problem and whether the training was part of a wider initiative or programme of organisational change).

- Whether or not the organisation had had an Acas Workplace Project was included as a dummy variable.

- The size of organisation was included according to the number of employees.

- The number of months since the training had finished was also included to investigate how outcomes varied over time. Two hypotheses were that some effects would take time to emerge or become pronounced; and that other effects would be short-term and become less salient with time.

The regression on satisfaction levels also considered the following:

- Whether or not respondents noted positive impacts from the training in nine key aspects of employment relations, people management and organisational practices were included as a series of dummy variables.

- Whether or not organisations changed policies or procedures as a result of the training was included as a dummy variable.

- Whether or not respondents considered that the training objectives had been completely achieved was included as a dummy variable.

Factors affecting client satisfaction

Binary logistic regression was carried out with the dependent variable of whether or not respondents reported being 'very satisfied' with the Workplace Training (0=not 'very satisfied'; 1='very satisfied'). Two-thirds of all respondents (67 per cent) reported being very satisfied with their training, giving a reasonable split between the two variable categories. The results are shown in Table A2.3.

Table A2.3: Logistic regression: satisfaction with Workplace Training ('very satisfied'=1)

	Odds ratios
Objectives completely achieved	5.197***
Very good value for money	4.339***
Topic: Employment relations (reference)	
Topic: Fair treatment	1.463
Topic: Other HR/people management	2.079*
Positive impact on levels of trust between managers and employees	1.898*
Positive impact on dealing with employment relation issues in a timely way	1.878*
Constant	0.183

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
Notes: -2 log likelihood =404.835; N=418
Source: IES, 2008

Factors affecting achievement of objectives

Binary logistic regression was used with the dependent variable of whether or not respondents thought that the main training objectives had been 'completely achieved' (0=not completely achieved; 1=completely achieved). This was considered the best single proxy for training success, as it takes account of both the nature of the training and client expectations. Bottom-line impacts on

employment relations and HR were not judged practicable, the numbers of respondents giving positive responses being too small for meaningful analysis. This decision is further backed up by the first logistic regression, which identified complete achievement of objectives as the most important factor influencing client satisfaction.

Roughly half (48 per cent) of respondents said that their objectives had been completely achieved and most of the remainder stated that they had been partly achieved: this gives a good split between the two variable categories. The results are presented in Table A2.4.

Table A2.4: Logistic regression: achievement of training objectives ('completely achieved'=1)

	Odds ratios
Main objective: improving employment relations	0.546**
Main objective: improving the organisation's performance	0.454*
HR involved in tailoring training	2.516***
Training part of wider programme	0.631*
Constant	1.038

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.
Note: -2 Log likelihood=531.793; N=418.
Source: IES, 2008

APPENDIX 3: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

See following pages.

CONFIDENTIAL

ACAS WORKPLACE TRAINING IMPACT SURVEY:
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (FINAL)

Key information on this interview

If necessary, you can draw on the following to explain the research.

● **Client**: Acas – the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, a non-departmental Government body.

● **Aim of research**: to evaluate the impact of Acas' training courses run in organisations. We are also looking at why organisations commission Acas training.

● **Subject of research**: the training that Acas carried out on [TOPIC] in [ORGANISATION] that finished approximately [MONTHS] ago.

● **Letter**: We will have sent a letter to the named contact within the last two weeks.

● **Timing of interview**: we expect the interview to last about 15 minutes and no longer than 20. We can call back at a more convenient time, although ideally, we would like to carry out the interview in the next week (pilot) / two weeks (actual survey). We aim to have pilot interviews completed by Friday 9 Nov and the survey interviews by Friday 21 Dec.

● **Target respondent**: we want to speak to the person in each organisation best placed to discuss why you commissioned the Acas training on [TOPIC] and how it has impacted on your organisation.

● **Research team**: the research is being led by IES (the Institute for Employment Studies) and the interviews are being carried out by Employment Research Limited.

● **Employment Research Ltd**: we are an independent social research company that's been running for 12 years; we adhere to Data Protection laws and the MRS Code of Conduct.

● **Confidentiality & anonymity**: all information we collect will be treated **confidentially**, which means that no-one outside the research team will be made aware of any information you give. The information will be reported **anonymously**, meaning that any details that could identify your organisation will be removed.

● In case of respondent **queries**: first port of call Jonny Gifford (IES) on [number]; or Andrew Sutherland on [number] if they specifically want to speak to Acas.

Introduction to interview

Hello, my name's _____. I'm calling from Employment Research to discuss some training that you've had from Acas. Could I please speak to _____?

1A.   IF INDIVIDUAL NO LONGER AT COMPANY / NOT AVAILABLE:

We need to speak to the person responsible for training in the company. Could you tell me who this is? Would you be able to put me through to them or their department? [UPDATE DATABASE]

1B.   IF PUT THROUGH:

Hello, my name's _____ from Employment Research, an independent research company.

We're doing some research on behalf of Acas to explore employer views of Acas' workplace training. We want to discuss why it was commissioned and what the impact of the training was.

[OPTIONAL:] You may have received a letter recently regarding this survey.
To do the survey, we need to speak to the person responsible for training in the company. Can I confirm that that is you?

[IF ALREADY SURVEYED BY ACAS:] **If you or someone else at your organisation has used any other Acas services, it's <u>possible</u> that you will have already been contacted in the recent past with a view to undertaking a survey on behalf of Acas. If this is the case, that call would not have been to do with the Workplace Training we are looking at today, because Acas services are all evaluated separately. Sorry for the extra demand on your time but this is a national evaluation of Workplace Training and we'd be extremely/additionally grateful if you could participate in this research, too.**

1C.   IF NO: ESTABLISH WHO IS APPROPRIATE CONTACT, EDIT DATABASE AND ASK TO BE PUT THROUGH; GO BACK TO 1B.

1D.   If YES:

The interview will be confidential - no-one outside the research team will be made aware of any information you give – and the information will be reported anonymously.

The survey should take 15 to 20 minutes. Are you able to do the interview now?

If YES: GO TO Q2.

1E.   If NO:
May I arrange a time to call you back?

IF REFUSE TO TAKE PART:
May I ask why not?

Company policy	1	
Already been interviewed for Acas survey	2	
No time	3	Thank and close
No reason given	4	
Other [RECORD]:	5	

Main interview

2A.   IF TOPIC SPECIFIED: According to Acas' records, Acas ran a course on [TOPIC] in your organization that finished [MONTH, YEAR].
IF TOPIC= 'OTHER': According to Acas' records, Acas ran a course called [TITLE] in your organization that finished [MONTH, YEAR]. CLARIFY THE MAIN AREA OF TRAINING & USE THIS FOR 'TOPIC'.

We will begin by asking you a few background questions and will then focus on this training course.

3A.   Approximately how many staff are employed in your organization in the UK?

IF NECESSARY READ OUT OPTIONS:

1 to 4	1	
5 to 9	2	
10 to 24	3	
25 to 49	4	
50 to 99	5	GO TO NEXT Q
100 to 199	6	
200 to 499	7	
500 to 999	8	
1000 plus	9	
Don't know	10	

3B.   How many sites or workplaces does your organisation have in the UK? _____

3C.   **IF 3B>1:**
Was the training on [TOPIC] attended by staff from a specific site or workplace; from two or more specific sites; or from across your organisation?

From one workplace or site	1	
From two /more specific sites	2	
From across the whole organisation	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Don't know	4	
Other [RECORD]:	5	

3D.   **IF 3C=1or2:**
Approximately how many staff are employed in total **at this site / at these sites?**

[PROMPT   IF   NECESSARY:]
In total, about how many people are employed at the site / sites that the training delegates came from?

IF NECESSARY READ OUT OPTIONS:

1 to 4	1	
5 to 9	2	
10 to 24	3	
25 to 49	4	
50 to 99	5	GO TO NEXT Q
100 to 199	6	
200 to 499	7	
500 to 999	8	

1000 plus	9
Don't know	10

4A.   For what reasons did [ORGANISATION] decide to commission training on [TOPIC]?

   CODE ALL THAT APPLY (DO NOT READ OUT):

In response to legislation	1	
Meeting requirements of parent organisation	2	
To inform and help develop policies	3	
To support implementation of / adherence to company policies	4	
To help with an organisational problem / improve in TOPIC area	5	GO TO NEXT Q
As part of a wider initiative / programme of change in the	6	
To be seen to be following 'good practice'	7	
Don't know	8	

OTHER (RECORD VERBATIM):

9	Other 1.
10	Other 2.
11	Other 3.

4B.   What other reasons were there?
   REPEAT UNTIL 'NO OTHER REASON'; CODE/RECORD ALL ANSWERS.

4C.   IF > 1 REASON: And which of those do you think was the main reason for the training?
   CODE ONE (DO NOT READ OUT):

In response to legislation	1	
Meeting requirements of parent organisation	2	
To inform and help develop policies	3	
To help implement new policies	4	
To address a recognised organisational problem	5	
As part of a wider initiative / programme of change in the	6	GO TO NEXT Q
To be seen to be following 'good practice'	7	
Other 1.	8	
Other 2.	9	
Other 3.	10	
Don't know	11	

4D.   **IF 4A.6 NOT MENTIONED** ("Part of a wider initiative / programme of change"):
   Was the training part of a wider initiative or programme of change in [organisation]?

Yes	1	
No	2	GO TO NEXT Q
Don't know	3	

PROMPT IF NECESSARY: Did you commission the training to fit in with a broader organisational programme that also focused on or related to [TOPIC]?

5A.   Thinking about the specific objectives of the training, how important were the following?

- How important or unimportant was improving adherence to policies or procedures as an objective for the training, was it **very important**, **fairly important**, **not very important**, **or not at all important**?

- How important or unimportant was improving employee health or well-being, was it **very important**, **fairly important**, **not very important**, **or not at all important** for the training objectives? Etc.

READ OUT EACH & CODE TO SCALE:
VERY IMPORTANT– CODE: 1
FAIRLY IMPORTANT– CODE: 2
NOT VERY IMPORTANT – CODE: 3
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT – CODE: 4
DON'T KNOW – CODE: 5

		CODE 1-5:	
1	Improving adherence to policies or procedures		
2	Improving employee health or well-being		
3	Reducing absenteeism		
4	Improving employment relations		
5	Improving the organisation's performance		
6	Promoting equality or diversity		
7	Improving staff knowledge		
8	Reducing staff turnover		GO TO NEXT Q

5B.   Of these objectives you said were important in the last question, which one or two you would see as being most important objectives for the training? [ALLOW no more than 2 objectives given]

Objective 1:_____

Objective 2:_____

6A.   Why did you choose Acas as your training provider?

CODE ALL THAT APPLY.
DO NOT READ OUT options, except if it is unclear which sub-categories in **'Independence' or 'Expertise'** are being referred to. PROMPTS for these:
- Do you mean **independence** from management and the trade union; or from the Government (e.g. advice on legislation); or both?
- Do you mean general **expertise** in employment relations or HR; or specific expertise in [TOPIC]?

Independence:	advice was independent of management & Trade	1	
	advice (eg on legislation) was independent of	2	
Government sponsored		3	
Expertise:	General expertise in employment relations or HR	4	
	Expertise in [TOPIC]	5	
Offered value for money		6	
Good experience of Acas in past – if so, which service (SPECIFY - Acas to re-code)		7	GO TO NEXT Q
Personal recommendation of Acas		8	
Good reputation as a training provider		9	
Heard of Acas through Acas publicity		10	
Did not know who else to use		11	
Acas approached us		12	
Not involved in decision		13	
Don't Know		14	

15 - OTHER (RECORD VERBATIM):

6B.   What other reasons were there?
REPEAT UNTIL 'NO OTHER REASON'; CODE/RECORD ALL ANSWERS.

7A.   Thinking of how the training was tailored to your organisation, was your **management** involved in this process?
Was the **trade union** involved (in tailoring the training to your organisation)?
Were any **other staff representatives** involved?
Was **anyone else** at your organisation involved? **(Who?)**

1	Management	YES (1)	NO (2)	DON'T KNOW (3)	
2	Trade union	YES (1)	NO (2)	DON'T KNOW (3)	
3	Other staff reps	YES (1)	NO (2)	DON'T KNOW (3)	
4	Anyone else at	YES (1)	NO (2)	DON'T KNOW (3)	
5	If 4=YES: who?	(RECORD):			GO TO NEXT Q

8A.   In general, was the training compulsory or optional?

Compulsory	1	
Optional	2	GO TO NEXT Q
Don't know	3	

9A.	Was the training attended by any of the following?

READ OUT:

1	trade union representatives	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	
2	non-union staff representatives	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	
3	trade union full-time officials	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	GO TO NEXT Q

9B.	IF 9A=2(NO), ASK AS APPROPRIATE:
Do you have [READ OUT FROM BELOW] in your organisation?

1	trade union representatives	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	
2	non-union staff representatives	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	
3	trade union full-time officials	Yes (1)	No (2)	Don't know (3)	GO TO NEXT Q

10A.	Thinking about the general attitude of staff to the underlying message of the training, which of the following best describes their attitude?

Staff were **generally against** the underlying message; **generally in favour** of it; staff had **mixed views** on it; or staff **generally** had **no opinion** on it?

CODE ONE ONLY:

Generally against	1	
Generally in favour of	2	
Staff had mixed views on the ideas	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Staff generally had no opinion	4	
Don't know / too difficult to say	5	

6 - OTHER (RECORD VERBATIM):

11A.	Did you evaluate the training in any of the following ways?

READ OUT AND CODE ALL THAT APPLY:

1	Using Acas' feedback forms for delegates	
2	Using your own feedback forms on the day	
3	Conducting a before-and-after survey of delegates	
4	Conducting a survey of delegates' line managers	
5	By analysing related outcomes in the area of [TOPIC]	
6	Informally, at meetings or in group discussions	

7	Did you use any other methods to evaluate the training? (What were they?) [RECORD:]	GO TO NEXT Q	

11B. IF YES TO ANY:
Based on the results of your evaluation, how would you say the training has impacted on [organisation]?
RECORD VERBATIM:

11C. What other impacts did your evaluation reveal?
REPEAT UNTIL 'NO OTHER REASON'. RECORD ALL ANSWERS

N.B. Q12: Ask 12A and then 12B for each question in tandem [not 12A (1 to 6) and then 12B (1 to 6)].

12A. In the period since you completed the training, would you say that the following have **increased**, **decreased** or **stayed the same**:

- Firstly, **the number of grievances**. [IF NECESSARY:] Would you say that has increased, decreased or stayed the same? GO TO 12B

- Secondly, **the number of disciplinaries**… GO TO 12B

- etc [READ OUT FROM TABLE]

CODE TO SCALE:
INCREASED – CODE: 1
DECREASED – CODE: 2
STAYED THE SAME – CODE: 3
DON'T KNOW – CODE: 4

	READ OUT:	12A: CODE 1-4	12B: CODE 1-4	
1	The number of grievances			
2	The number of disciplinaries			
3	The number of industrial disputes			
4	Absence levels			
5	Staff turnover			
6	Productivity			GO TO Q13

12B. **FOR EACH POINT IN 12A**, *IF INCREASE OR DECREASE:*
And would you say that this change was **nothing to do with training**; **partially due to the training**; or **largely to do with the training**?
CODE TO SCALE:
NOTHING TO DO WITH THE TRAINING – CODE: 1
PARTIALLY DUE TO THE TRAINING – CODE: 2
LARGELY DUE TO THE TRAINING 3
DON'T KNOW – CODE: 4

13A. Now I'd like to turn to the impact you think the training has had **on participants**.

In your view, would you say the impact the training had on **participants' awareness of their responsibilities** was very positive, slightly positive, slightly negative, very negative, or that there was no impact?

Would you say the impact of the training on **participants' awareness of their rights** was very positive, slightly positive, slightly negative, very negative, or that there was no impact?

…ETC [READ FROM TABLE]

CODE TO SCALE:
VERY POSITIVE IMPACT – CODE: 1
SLIGHTLY POSITIVE IMPACT – CODE: 2
SLIGHTLY NEGATIVE IMPACT – CODE: 3
VERY NEGATIVE IMPACT – CODE: 4
NO IMPACT – CODE: 5
DON'T KNOW – CODE: 6

IF 3 OR 4 (NEGATIVE):
Why was that? / Why do you say there was a (very) negative impact?

	READ OUT:	CODE 1-6:	IF 3 OR 4 (NEGATIVE), WHY? (RECORD VERBATIM):
1	Participants' awareness of their responsibilities		
2	Participants' awareness of their rights		
3	Participants' adherence to your organisation's		
4	Participants' ability to deal effectively with		

Thinking now about the **wider impact of the training on the organisation**:

In your view, would you say the impact the training had on **levels of trust between senior management and employee representatives** was very positive, slightly positive, slightly negative, very negative, or that there was no impact?

Would you say the impact of the training on **levels of trust between managers and employees** was very positive, slightly positive, slightly negative, very negative, or that there was no impact?

…ETC [READ FROM TABLE]

	READ OUT:	CODE 1-6:	IF 3 OR 4 (NEGATIVE), WHY? (RECORD VERBATIM):
5	Levels of trust between senior management and employee representatives		
6	Levels of trust between managers and		
7	Dealing with employment relations issues in a timely way		
8	Dealing with employment relations issues in an effective way		
9	Staff morale		
10	The fair treatment of employees		
11	The ability to manage change in staff or HR		
12	The ability to prevent industrial action		

13	The organisations' overall ability to deal effectively with [TOPIC]		

13B.   Did [ORGANISATION] change its policies or procedures on [TOPIC] as a result of the training?
         YES (1) / NO (2) / DON'T KNOW (3)

14A.   Taking everything into account, now that **[INSERT DATE FROM MI]** has passed since you received the training from Acas, would you say you were: **very dissatisfied; fairly dissatisfied; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; fairly satisfied; or very satisfied?**

Very dissatisfied	1	
Fairly dissatisfied	2	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Fairly satisfied	4	
Very satisfied	5	
Don't know	6	

14B.   You said that the main objectives in doing the training were [...**REFER TO 5B**]. Overall, would you say the objectives of the training were: **not at all achieved, partly achieved; or completely achieved?**

Not at all achieved	1	
Partly achieved	2	
Completely achieved	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Don't know	4	

14C.   How would you rate the value for money of the training: **very good** value for money; **fairly good** value for money; **average** value for money; **fairly poor** value for money; **or very poor** value for money?

Very good	1	
Fairly Good	2	
Average	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Fairly Poor	4	
Very poor	5	
Don't know	6	

14D.   Would you recommend Acas training on [TOPIC] to other organisations?

Yes	1	
No	2	GO TO NEXT Q
Don't know	3	

14E.   If in the future you need more training on this, or another area of employment relations, how likely would you be to use Acas training again: **very unlikely; fairly unlikely; neither likely nor unlikely, fairly likely; or very likely?**

Very unlikely	1	
Fairly unlikely	2	
Neither likely nor unlikely	3	GO TO NEXT Q
Fairly likely	4	
Very likely	5	
Don't know	6	

15A.   Is there anything else you would like to add about the Acas Workplace Training you received?

RECORD VERBATIM:

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                                    66
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APPENDIX 4: RECRUITMENT LETTER & RETURN SLIP

See following pages.

Date

«Title» «Firstname» «Surname»
«Position»
«Address1»
«Address2»
«Address3»
«Address4»
«Address5»
«Address6»

Ref: «ID_No»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

ACAS Research: Investigating the impact of Workplace Training

As part of its ongoing evaluation of its training, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) has commissioned a survey to investigate the impact of its in-company training service. I am writing to ask for your assistance in this important research. **As an employer that has commissioned Acas training yourself, we would be very interested in speaking to you**. This research will help us obtain a better understanding of issues surrounding workplace training and assist Acas in improving its services for employers.

A member of the research team will telephone you on «Telephone» within the next week or two, to ask you some questions about:

a) the reasons why you commissioned training on «Topic», and

b) the impact that the training has had on your organisation.

The research is being carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and the interviews are being conducted by Employment Research Limited. Both IES and Employment Research are independent research organisations.
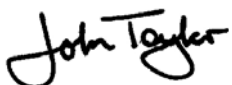
Interviews will take approximately 15 minutes and can be arranged at your convenience. The research is entirely confidential and the results will be presented anonymously: no one outside of the research team will have information on who has or has not participated, and any identifying details will be deleted after the results have been processed.

It is important that we gain a representative picture of how Acas training has impacted on its customers. We would therefore be very grateful for your participation in this research.

If you would like to discuss the research further, please contact Jonny Gifford at IES on [number]; or email [email].

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

Yours sincerely

John Taylor

John Taylor

Acas Chief Executive

IMPORTANT – NOTIFICATION OF ALTERNATIVE CONTACT OR TELEPHONE NUMBER

Acas' records list you as the person at your organisation best placed to discuss the reasons why you commissioned training and the impact that the training has had on your organisation. **If this person is not you, we would be very grateful if you could direct us to her/him**. You can nominate an alternative contact at your organisation to participate in this study by calling Geoff Pike at Employment Research on [number] or email [email]. Alternatively, you can use the reply-slip overleaf. You can also get in touch in any of these ways to notify us if we have your telephone number incorrectly listed (above).

Nomination of Alternative Contact

I would like to nominate an alternative contact at my organisation to participate in this study:

Name of organisation   ....

Name of alternative contact   ....

Job title   ....

Telephone number   ....

Notification of Alternative Telephone Number

I am the correct person at my organisation to participate in this study but you have my telephone number incorrectly listed:

Your name   ....

Name of organisation   ....

My correct telephone number is ....

If you opt to use this reply slip, please return to:

Geoff Pike
Employment Research Ltd
45 Portland Road
Hove
BN3 5DQ

or, you can FAX this page to Employment Research direct on [number].

ies

APPENDIX 5: REFERENCES

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