

Acas business plan 2021 to 2022

21 October 2021

Introduction from the chief executive

Acas is proud to serve millions of employers and employees every year and make a difference to working lives. We are Britain's independent workplace experts, and our purpose is to make working life better for everyone in Great Britain.

We prevent workplace conflict by helping employers and employees understand employment rights and responsibilities and work through workplace relation problems by providing training, advice and guidance. Where conflict cannot be averted, we do all we can to resolve it. We also use our insight and knowledge to influence workplace policy.

This year it is more important than ever that we support healthy working relationships and prevent and resolve problems and disputes at work. Looking back over the past year we have helped millions of people whose work has been disrupted by the pandemic. We have supported them to make effective decisions, translating our expertise into everyday action on issues from furlough through to remote working. But we want to do even more to respond to the changing world of work with businesses, people and community at the heart of all we do.

I am therefore delighted to launch our 2021 to 2022 business plan which will build on the fantastic work, support and difference the Acas team has made to working lives in what has been an unprecedented year.

This year we'll focus on getting our expert advice and training into more workplaces, as businesses grapple with the challenges of recovering from coronavirus (COVID-19). We'll build the effectiveness of our dispute resolution services so we can reduce the cost and unhappiness of conflict and we'll look afresh at how to prevent conflict at work. We'll work with partners and use our insight into the world of work to understand how to make it better.

Underpinning all our work is a commitment to embrace difference, grow inclusion and create fairness. It is at the heart of all that we do and this year we will take action to make our online provision even more accessible. We are going to work with partners to help organisations develop practical solutions to be more diverse and inclusive and we'll continue our actions to make Acas itself more fully representative of the workforce of Great Britain.

Delivering on our plans will mean we support businesses in their recovery from the pandemic, and we help more people to thrive in healthy workplaces. These are essential steps to economic growth and higher productivity.

The success of Acas is built on its expertise. Our skilled staff are committed to giving great service to everyone, when they need our help. We look forward to delivering on our plans for 2021 to 2022 and the opportunities the year ahead will bring.

Susan Clews
Chief Executive

Our purpose

At the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), we exist to make working life better for everyone in Britain.

Healthy working relationships are critical not just to the success of workplaces and the economy but also because they allow people to flourish and find meaning and purpose at work.

Where there are problems in working life, relationships suffer and there is a cost. In part, this is financial, paid for by businesses, workers, and the wider economy. But there are emotional costs too, for everyone involved.

At Acas, we help people resolve these problems. We do so by thinking first about the people involved, helping them to have the open, honest conversations that are so often the solution. Whenever we can, we prevent disputes before they happen, through training and advice.

But where they cannot be avoided, we do all we can to resolve them, fulfilling our legal responsibility.

Employers often come to us in their most difficult moments and employees at their lowest ebb. Both are looking for someone they can trust. To be worthy of that trust, we are:

Expert

We have been providing advice and conciliation to Britain's workplaces for over a century. While work has changed beyond recognition, our insight and experience ensure we give the most up-to-date advice. We tackle new issues with authority.

Impartial

We work with all sides to help resolve conflict, treating each side equally. We can always be relied upon to give confidential advice and to be frank and honest.

Independent

We are publicly funded and have been independent since 1974. We act only to promote a better future at work.

Fair

A good workplace is a fair one. At Acas, inclusion is central to all we do - we respect and value difference, and aim to follow the highest standards. What we ask of others, we ask of ourselves too.

At Acas, we lead the way in promoting good work and reducing disputes. Our success relies on our people working in partnership with employees and employers, academics and policymakers, trade union and business leaders.

Together, we make working life better for everyone in Britain.

Our strategic ambitions 2021 to 2025

Acas has set out its longer-term ambitions in [our 2021 to 2025 strategy](#).

They are:

1. growing our reach and access
2. resolving disputes more quickly and effectively
3. forging consensus on the future of work

4. embracing difference, increasing inclusion, creating fairness

Our 2021 to 2022 business plan lays the foundations of our strategy and sets out our first bold steps towards its delivery. It describes a year of transition and recovery for our customers and Acas's response to meet these needs.

This plan highlights the actions we will take, and it includes the key performance indicators (KPIs) for our service standards, against which we will report.

Growing our reach and access

Our focus in 2021 is to support the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching more businesses and people and working with the sectors that need us most.

The world is returning to new ways of working after the pandemic. Acas expert advice and guidance is already helping employers and employees and people as they reshape organisations and get back to work. We will expand our support as workplaces recover from COVID-19, enabling productive work. Whether it's getting the balance right between home and workplace, or what to do about vaccination at work, we will make sure that our guidance, advice and training gives the answers.

In 2021 to 2022 we plan to reach more small and medium businesses (SMEs), and more employees. We will prioritise sectors where we are needed most, where representation is low so we can support compliance with employment law and raise line manager skills. We will work with trusted partners to help us to get our support out faster and to reach further.

Our practical steps in 2021 to 2022 are to:

- develop and deliver new products and services to help employees and employers return to fairer, safer, more productive workplaces after COVID-19
- develop the channels we use so that we reach our customers as effectively as we can, for instance through more or enhanced digital services
- target our expert guidance, advice and training towards small and medium businesses and the people and sectors who need us most
- build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones across Britain, especially in parts of the economy hardest hit by COVID-19 so that we can reach more people and businesses who need our help

Resolving disputes more quickly and effectively

We are experts in the prevention of workplace conflict and where conflict cannot be avoided, we aim to resolve it, saving both employers, employees and trade unions from the financial and emotional costs of conflict. We do this in individual disputes between employer and employee, and in 'collective' disputes, between employers and trade unions representing groups of employees.

In the year ahead our focus is on developing our individual dispute resolution services so that we can deliver better outcomes for individuals, businesses and the wider economy and reduce the cost of conflict.

We expect an increase in the number of workplace disputes this year as the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) ends and as businesses and employees adjust to the new world of work after COVID-19. It is our statutory duty to try to prevent workplace disputes from reaching an employment tribunal, and in 2021 to 2022 we will take steps to improve how we do that, helping thousands of employers and employees solve their problems and reduce conflict.

Our practical steps in 2021 to 2022 are to:

- explore how new technology can help us to improve the dispute resolution service we offer to customers
- adapt how we handle disputes now so that we deliver the best service to customers

- explore with our partners fresh approaches to dispute resolution, seeking to identify new paths to earlier resolution of disputes and conflicts
- launch new evidence on the cost of conflict to employers in Great Britain

Forging consensus on the future of work

We know that the year ahead offers significant challenges for workplaces as they focus on recovery, growth and well-being. In 2021 to 2022 our ambition to build consensus on the future of work starts with how we predict and respond to these big workplace challenges.

This year we will continue to build our understanding of the world of work, focusing on developing our data and insight capabilities so that we can build evidence and inform debate. We will also develop our strong clear voice and partnerships to influence the future of work across Britain. We will work with partners and policy makers to shape, define and seize the opportunity to create a healthy and productive labour market as the economy reopens and looks to the longer term.

Our practical steps in 2021 to 2022 are to:

- define the scope of a new conflict resolution centre at Acas: its vision, scale, structure, objectives, and partners
- create a plan for a new Acas data and insight unit including its principles and working methods
- convene a policy partnership forum bringing together external partners to develop policies and anticipate new trends in the workplace
- offer guidance for workplaces that supports a safe and productive return to work after the pandemic
- launch new evidence on the cost of conflict to employers to engage stakeholders on the importance of conflict resolution and inform development of our services

Embracing difference, increasing inclusion, creating fairness

Inclusion is at the centre of our plans. We know that fair workplaces and organisational success go hand in hand, which is good for individuals and good for business too.

We are experts in promoting diversity and inclusion and this year we will be doing more to grow fairness and inclusion in workplaces. We will strengthen our partnership work to promote inclusion across Great Britain and we will take decisive steps on the path to making Acas fully representative of the British workforce. We will also take further action to improve the accessibility of our services.

Our practical steps in 2021 to 2022 are to:

- establish new partnerships, both nationally and regionally, to support the levelling up agenda and to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace
- conduct research to help us to understand how we can make our services easier to access and understand, and take first steps on the research where we can
- set out a plan to ensure we become a leading body in promoting practical solutions to making workplaces more diverse and inclusive
- implement our People Strategy, and particularly our new Race Action Plan, to increase diversity within Acas

Delivering our plans

We made many changes to how we work during the pandemic. We continue to learn from how we adapted in 2020 and in the year ahead we will further strengthen how we do things to be able to deliver this business plan and fulfil our ambitions.

We are reviewing how we deliver to customers, how we work across Acas and how we prioritise our limited resources so that we can develop and grow our services and make working lives better for everyone in Britain.

We will do that by:

- reviewing the shape of our organisation to ensure we have the capability and capacity to deliver effectively and responsively to our customers, and deliver the greatest value for money to the taxpayer
- introducing greater flexibility into how and where we work to offer the best outcomes for our customers and our staff
- updating our estates and locations strategy, consistent with the government's 'Places for Growth' agenda, and post-COVID-19 future ways of working
- managing our resources effectively, prioritising carefully and ensuring benefits are realised, enabling us to deliver the best value for our customers and the taxpayer

Green plan

Acas is committed to supporting the government's goal of being carbon neutral by 2050. We will increase our sustainability and reduce our environmental impacts. This year we will take practical measures to reduce our carbon footprint including making air travel for business a last resort option, requiring hire cars for business use to be hybrid as a minimum and electric if possible, and by reducing the amount spent on office consumables including paper and disposable cups. We will also work with the owners of our buildings to explore ways to reduce carbon emissions, water usage and waste to landfill from our office space.

Corporate governance

This will be a year of significant change for Acas as we mobilise our four-year strategy, adjust to COVID-19 ourselves and respond to new and increased demand from customers. We will continue to review the effectiveness of our governance and develop risk management and change management capability to support those processes.

Key performance indicators 2021 to 2022

These tables show our performance targets for the financial year April 2021 to March 2022.

1. Conciliation in collective disputes		Target
1.1 Promotion of a settlement or progress towards a settlement in disputes in which Acas is involved		85%
2. Individual disputes referred for conciliation		Target
2.1 Percentage of early conciliation notifications which result in a conciliated settlement between parties		19%
2.2 Percentage of early conciliation notifications which result in a conciliated settlement between parties or another positive outcome		28%
2.3 Percentage of employment tribunal cases which result in a conciliated settlement disregarding any which have been struck out by the courts		55%
2.4 Percentage of employment tribunal cases which are positively resolved following Acas conciliation		75%
3. Acas training services		Target

3.1 Percentage of open access customers reporting they were satisfied with the course	95%
3.2 Percentage of workplace training customers reporting they were satisfied with the course	95%
3.3 Percentage of open access customers reporting that the training met their learning needs	90%
3.4 Percentage of webinar customers reporting they are satisfied with the session	90%
4. Telephone helpline advice on workplace problems	Targ
4.1 The percentage of users who were able to take clear action following their call to the Acas helpline	85%
5. Digital advice on workplace problems	Tar
5.1 Percentage of positive engagement of users from the website (where an individual stays longer than 10 seconds on an advice page) – this refers to all advice pages and excludes corporate information	85%

Service volumes 2021 to 2022

Tables showing the volumes of service we expect to provide in the financial year April 2021 to March 2022.

Advice and training services	Volumes	Income
Web visits (user sessions)	13.2 million	n/a
Digital advice visits (user sessions)	8.8 million	n/a
Helpline calls and related advice	800,000	n/a
In-depth advice	4,475	n/a
E-learning sessions	35,000	n/a
Webinars	20	n/a
Webinar delegates	8,000	n/a
Webinar recording views (new measure)	2,000	n/a
Workplace projects (delivery days)	155	£125,000
Workplace training events	1,195	£1.6 million
Open access training events	1,350	£1.9 million
Open access training delegates	6,660	n/a
Conference and talks	35	£119,000
Collective conciliation and arbitration	Volumes	Income

Collective conciliation requests	577	n/a
Arbitration and mediation requests	20	n/a
Joint working projects (delivery days)	160	n/a
Individual dispute resolution	Volumes	Income
Early conciliation notifications	125,000	n/a
Conciliation in employment tribunal cases	35,000	n/a
Mediations in individual disputes	260	£284,000
Shaping and informing employment relations	Volumes	Income
Written papers (for example, research reports, published articles, commentary, blogs)	40	n/a
Speaking engagements hosted by Acas and stakeholders	35	n/a
Round tables, stakeholder forums, breakfast briefings	100	n/a

Total income: around £3.6 million.

Financial allocation

Table showing the amount of money allocated to Acas by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for the financial year April 2021 to March 2022.

This is provisional, and excludes the impact of adopting IFRS 16 (leases).

2021 to 2022 funding allocation	Amount
Capital (general)	£1.2 million
Total capital	£1.2 million
Programme (non-ringfenced)	£47.1 million
Programme (ringfenced)	£3.1 million
Total programme resource	£50.2 million
Administration (non-ringfenced)	£7.9 million
Administration (ringfenced)	£0
Total administration resource	£7.9 million

2021 to 2022 funding allocation	Amount
Annual managed expenditure (AME) (ringfenced)	£855,000
Total AME	£855,000