

Acas helpline evaluation 2023 to 2024

18 December 2024

Executive summary

The Acas helpline provides free and confidential advice to employers, employees and their representatives on employment rights, good practice and policies, and resolving workplace conflict. Over 578,000 calls were handled by the helpline telephone service during the operating year 2023 to 2024.

The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the helpline service, to ensure that this service continues to meet the needs of Acas's customers.

Of those that agreed to take part, completed questionnaires were received from 2,487 customers. This is a response rate of 14%.

Who used the Acas helpline?

The majority of employees and employers calling the helpline were female (62% and 77% respectively). Over this period, 1% of respondents chose not to disclose their sex and 0.3% of those who answered the gender identity question, stated their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. There are currently no official figures for those who identify their gender as different from the sex registered at birth.

The mean age of the respondents was 48 years. 82% of respondents said they came from a white background (71% of respondents identified as "British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, or Welsh"), with 7% identifying as Black or Black British and 5% as Asian or Asian British.

Overall, 88% of respondents were calling as an employee and 12% were calling as an employer. Over 6 in 10 respondents (61%) were in full-time employment, with a further 19% in part-time employment.

This report defines small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as micro (fewer than 10 employees), small (10 to 49 employees) and medium-sized (50 to 249 employees) enterprises. Large enterprises are those with more than 250 employees. Overall, the respondents were more likely to be calling from small and medium-sized enterprises (55%) rather than large enterprises (35%). Employees (37%) were significantly more likely to state they were from large enterprises than employers (17%). Conversely, employers (81%) were significantly more likely to be working for small and medium-sized enterprises compared to employees (51%).

Respondents were asked what the organisation or business mainly made or did at their place of work when they called. The responses were then matched to a Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code. The largest share of employees (18%) and employers (15%) reported this as the "human health and social work activities" industry.

What was the customers' journey to the Acas helpline?

Over half (53%) had visited the Acas website, 31% sought advice from a friend or family member, and 30% had discussed the issue with their management, employees or HR before calling the helpline.

Employers were significantly more likely to have visited the Acas website (66% compared with 51% of employees). Employers were significantly more likely to have visited another website (30%), compared with 21% of employees, to answer their query before calling the helpline. Employees were significantly more likely to have sought advice from a friend or family member (34% compared with 11% of employers) or from another body (25% compared with 15% of employers).

Respondents were most likely to have heard about the helpline through prior knowledge or having previously used Acas services (43%). Other groups of respondents found out about the helpline through a recommendation from a friend or family member (29%), through the Acas website (14%) or completed an internet search (10%).

Over 3 in 4 (76%) reached an adviser on the first attempt of calling. Respondents who reached the helpline on their first attempt were significantly more satisfied with the overall helpline service compared to those who had to call 2 or more times before receiving an answer.

47% of respondents reaching the helpline on the first attempt reported they were extremely satisfied with the overall helpline service compared to 31% who needed 2 or more attempts. The majority of respondents (82%) were satisfied (either extremely, very, or fairly) with the length of time taken for their call to be answered.

Why did customers call the Acas helpline?

41% of respondents were calling about a "discipline, dismissal and grievance" issue. The next most frequent subject matter was "contracts," cited by 24% of respondents, and "absence, sickness and stress", cited by 21% of respondents. All respondents used their own definitions of the topics.

Respondents were asked about the practice named 'dismissal and re-engagement' – this is sometimes known as 'fire and rehire' or 'dismiss and rehire'. The majority (84%) of respondents were not discussing the fire and rehire practice. This is compared to 7% who stated that the call involved the practice and 9% who did not know or did not answer the question.

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that their enquiry was stressful, urgent, or complex. Overall, there was a high level of agreement (either "strongly agree" or "agree") with each of these statements (85% stressful, 76% urgent and 74% complex).

39% of employees had been thinking about making a claim to an employment tribunal prior to calling the helpline and 12% of the employer respondents stated they contacted the helpline because they were concerned that 1 or more employees was considering making a claim to the employment tribunal.

What was the customers' experience of the service?

Over 18 in 20 (91%) respondents were satisfied with the overall helpline service, with over two-fifths (43%) feeling extremely satisfied. Employers reported higher levels of satisfaction with 96% of employers being satisfied (either extremely, very, or fairly) compared to 90% of employees.

Acas's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the helpline during the operating year 2023 to 2024 was "the percentage of users who were able to take clear action following their call to the Acas helpline". The target was 85%. This was measured by asking respondents if the information provided helped them decide what to do next. 84% agreed that the information provided by the adviser helped them decide what to do next for their query.

Respondents agreed that the Acas member of staff presented the information in an impartial way (94%), was knowledgeable (93%), understood their query (91%) and presented the information in a way they easily understood (91%). There was a lower level of agreement when asked if the adviser had explained the pros and cons of any options available (76%), with 17% stating they "neither agree nor disagree" with this statement. This lower level of agreement may partly be due to some helpline calls not requiring a discussion of the pros and cons of the advice given.

What were the outcomes and impacts of calling the Acas helpline, and what were customers' next steps?

88% of respondents took action as a result of their call. The most frequent course of action was discussing the problem with management, employees or HR, reported by 35% of respondents. Employers (42%) were more likely to have taken this action than employees (34%).

Overall, 18% sought advice from another body. Employers (8%) were significantly less likely to take this action than employees (19%). If additional advice was sought, the most common source was a lawyer or solicitor, cited by 44% of the 448 respondents.

75% of employers stated they had responsibility for introducing or changing policies or procedures in their workplace, of which 17% stated that their workplace had introduced or updated policies as a result of the call. A further 32% stated that while their workplace had not updated or introduced any policies as a result of their call they intended to do so.

At the time of survey completion, 85% of employees stated that they had not yet made an employment tribunal claim or submitted an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas. However, 49% of those were thinking about doing so.

72% of employees felt their call to the Acas helpline was important in their decision about whether or not to make a claim to an employment tribunal, with over half (51%) feeling it was very important.

How does operating year 2023 to 2024 compare to previous years?

Respondent characteristics in terms of sex, age and ethnicity were consistent during the last 3 operating years.

Employees (87% in 2021 to 2022, 88% in 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024) were consistently more likely to call the helpline each year compared to employers. Over the 3 periods, overall respondents were more likely to be calling about a small and medium-sized enterprise (58% in 2021 to 2022, 55% in 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024) rather than a large business.

Employees were most likely to be calling about workplaces performing "human health and social work activities," "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles" and "manufacturing" for the operating years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. In 2023 to 2024 manufacturing was replaced with "transport and storage" and "education". For employers, "human health and social work activities" were the most frequent for each of the 3 years, with "manufacturing," "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles," "accommodation and food service activities," administrative and support service activities" and "education" being the second or third most popular during the period.

There was an increase in respondents stating they visited the Acas website attempting to answer their query in another way prior to calling the helpline from 45% in 2021 to 2022 to 53% in 2023 to 2024.

Overall, the top 3 subject matter topics covered in respondents' queries remained "discipline, dismissal and grievance", "contracts" and "absence, sickness and stress" over the 3-year period. However, "diversity and discrimination" was the third most popular response for employees during 2023 to 2024 (21%) compared to 19% of respondents stating their query included a diversity and discrimination subject matter during 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. However, the respondents are not subject matter experts and therefore some caution should be applied on their choice of call subjects as their declared call topic may not reflect their underlying query. For example, "diversity and discrimination" helpline calls have been rising in number but as a percentage of total calls remain around 13%. Respondents may define discrimination in this context as being treated less favourably than someone else, while our advisers would be defining the subject by protected characteristics.

Employers reported higher levels of satisfaction during each of the 3 years (95% 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023, and 96% 2023 to 2024). The employee respondents' satisfaction levels have slightly decreased from 94% in 2021 to 2022 to 90% in 2023 to 2024.

Acas's Key Performance Indicator for the Acas helpline remained "the percentage of users who were able to take clear action following their call to the Acas helpline" over the 3-year period with a target of 85%. Unfortunately, Acas did not reach their target Key Performance Indicator in 2023 to 2024, achieving 84% compared to 88% and 87% in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 respectively.

1. Introduction

This report is based on data collected from Acas helpline customers using an online survey during the 2023 to 2024 operational year (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024).

The Acas helpline also receives inquiries through written communications (for example email), but currently the survey is only available to telephone customers. A survey pilot for customers emailing the helpline's accessibility service is being conducted during the 2024 to 2025 operating year.

Acas's Research, Analysis, and Insight (RAI) team managed the survey and wrote this report.

1.1. Objectives of the evaluation

1.1.1. Principal aim of the evaluation

The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the helpline service, to ensure that this service continues to meet the needs of Acas's customers.

1.1.2. Research questions

Who used the Acas helpline?

- What were the demographics of customers using the service?
- What were the workplace characteristics of those using the service?

What was the customers' journey to the Acas helpline?

- What steps did customers take before calling Acas to try and resolve their issues?
- How did customers become aware of the helpline and was the service easy to reach?

Why did customers call the Acas helpline?

- What was the reason for the call?
- What were the customers' perceptions of the workplace issue?
- Had the customer been thinking about escalating the issue (employee)?
- Had the customer been concerned about the issue escalating (employer)?

What was the customers' experience of the service?

- How satisfied were customers with the service?
- What were customers' perceptions of the information received?
- What were customers' perceptions of Acas advisers?

What were the outcomes and impacts of calling the Acas helpline, and what were customers' next steps?

- To what extent were customers able to take action following their call to helpline?
- Did the service lead to changes within the customer's organisation?
- Has a claim to the employment tribunal or an early conciliation notification been submitted?

How does operating year 2023 to 2024 compare to previous years?

- Who used the Acas helpline?
- What was the customers' journey to the Acas helpline?
- Why did customers call the Acas helpline?
- What was the customers' experience of the service?
- What were the outcomes and impacts of calling the Acas helpline, and what were customers' next steps?

1.2. Research methods

1.2.1. Sampling approach

Systematic sampling was adopted by inviting 1 in 15 helpline customers to participate in the online questionnaire. If the customer agreed, the helpline adviser collected their email address.

A subsequent email containing a unique link to the online questionnaire was sent to the helpline customer. This was followed by 2 email reminders to non-respondents sent 3 days and 7 days after the initial email containing the unique link.

During this period:

- 30,316 helpline customers were invited to take part in the helpline survey
- of those, 18,006 (59.4%) agreed to take part and provided an email address for the survey invite
- of those, 2,487 (14%) completed the survey (an additional 758, or 4%, started the survey but did not complete it)

1.2.2. Reporting conventions

Throughout this report, the term 'significant' is only used to describe differences within particular groups (for example customer type) that are statistically significant. When a difference is 'statistically significant' it is likely that the difference is not due to chance alone. Results should be treated as indicative if the sample base numbers of responses are under 100 participants.

There may be anomalies due to rounding differences in percentages reported throughout the report, which are never more or less than 1%.

Throughout the report, unless specifically stated otherwise, an "employee" denotes an employee, a former employee, or someone calling on behalf of an employee or former employee. An "employer" represents an employer or manager, calling on behalf of an organisation or its staff, or an outside representative calling on behalf of an employer.

2. Who used the Acas helpline?

To help ensure Acas is meeting the needs of all sections of society, the respondents were asked some questions relating to their sex, gender identity, age, ethnicity, and health or disability status. Respondents were made aware that they were free not to answer these questions.

2.1. What were the demographics of customers using the service?

The following section breaks down the key characteristics of the respondents according to their customer demographics and employment characteristics.

9% of respondents called the Acas helpline on behalf of a third-party employee and 1% on behalf of a third-party employer.

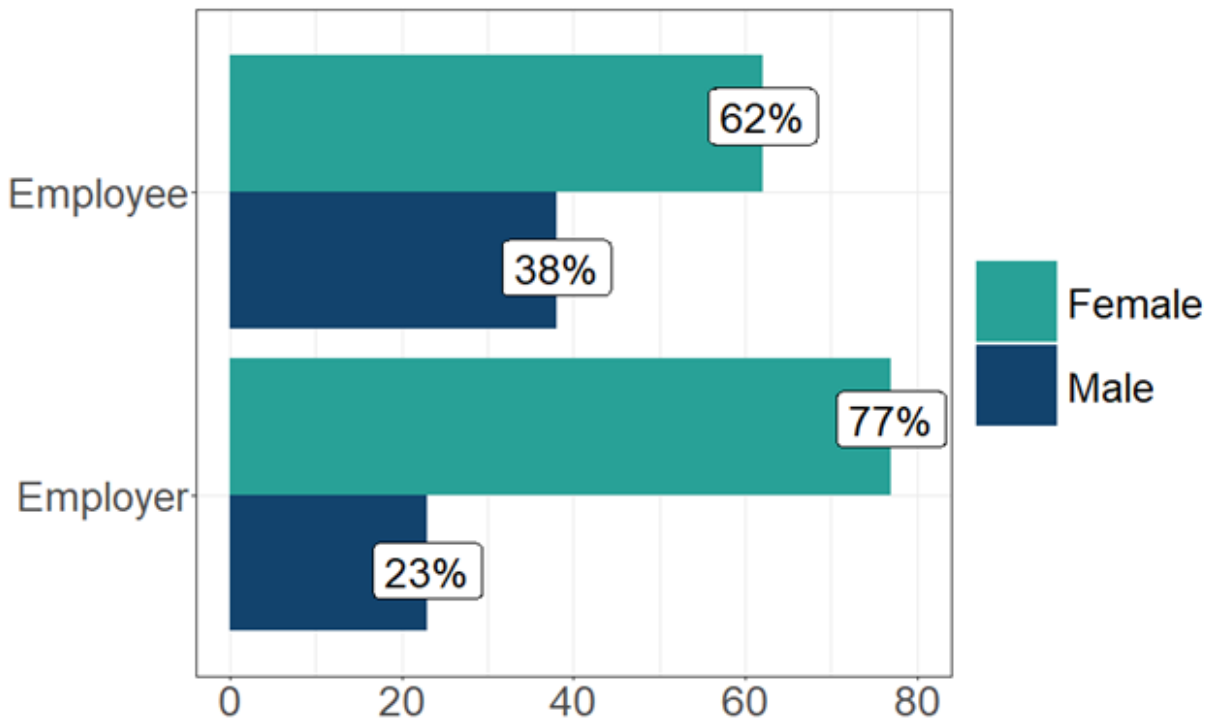
These respondents were asked about the job characteristics of the person they were calling on behalf of, but questions on personal demographics were only asked of customers themselves. The term 'respondent' is used in this section to include third parties on whose behalf the call was made.

2.1.1. Sex

The majority of employee and employer respondents were female (62% and 77% respectively). 1% of respondents chose not to disclose their sex.

Of those who answered the gender identity question, 0.3% stated their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. The [Analysis Function gender identity harmonised standard question](#) was used for this survey. However, there are currently no official figures for those who identify their gender as different from the sex registered at birth.

Figure 1: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by sex



Note: the legend order reflects the order of the data in the chart.

Sample base: 2,159 employee respondents, 299 employer respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by sex

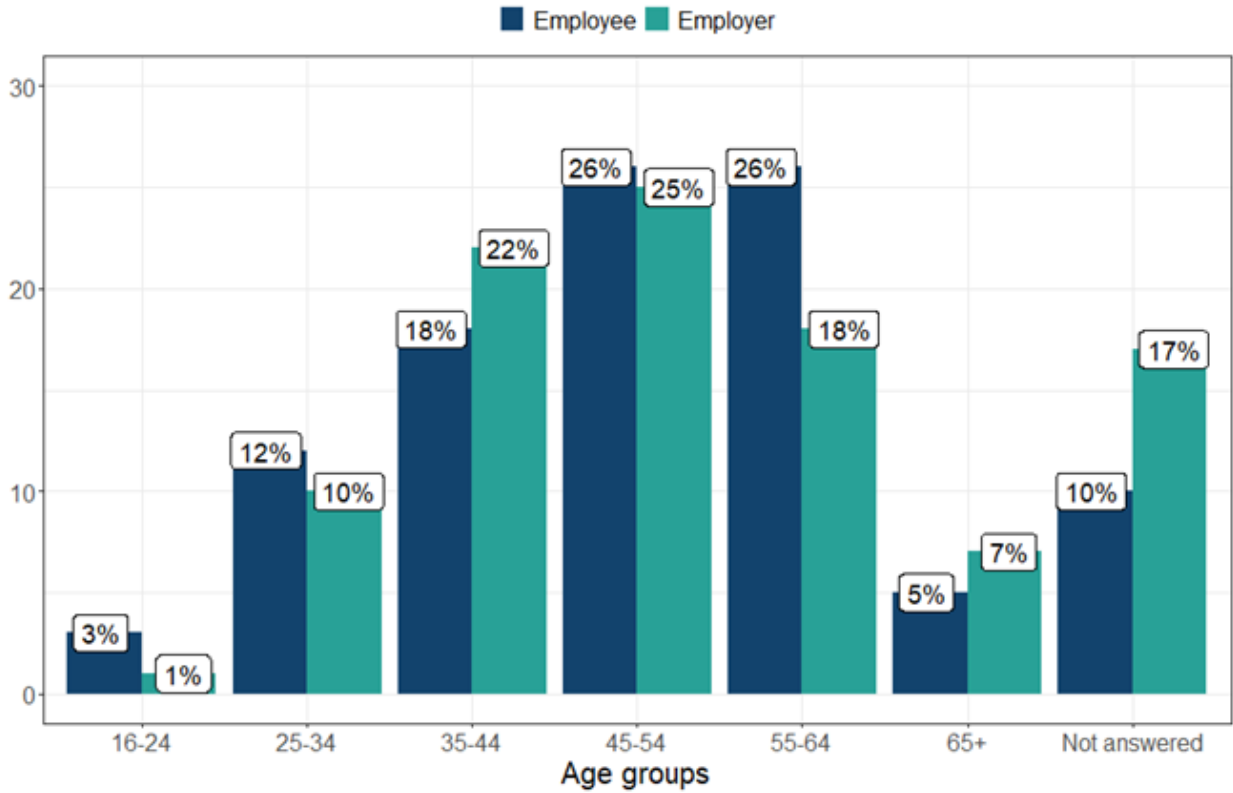
	Employee	Employer
Female	62%	77%
Male	38%	23%

2.1.2. Age

The mean age of the respondents was 48 years. 11% of respondents chose not to disclose their age.

Over half of respondents were in the middle-age groups, 44 to 54 (26%) and 55 to 64 (25%). Employees were significantly more likely to state that they were between 55 and 64 (26%) compared to 18% of employers.

Figure 2: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by age group



Note: the legend order reflects the order of the data in the chart.

Sample base: 2,181 employee respondents, 306 employer respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by age group

	Employee	Employer
16 to 24	3%	1%
25 to 34	12%	10%
35 to 44	18%	22%
45 to 54	26%	25%
55 to 64	26%	18%

	Employee	Employer
65+	5%	7%
Not answered	10%	17%

2.1.3. Ethnicity

82% of those who disclosed their ethnicity said they came from a white background. 71% of respondents identified as "British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, or Welsh", with 7% identifying as Black or Black British and 5% as Asian or Asian British.

2.1.4. Long lasting health conditions and illness

32% of respondents stated that they had a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. 10% of respondents chose "rather not say", "don't know" or did not answer the question.

Employees were significantly more likely to state that they had physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more when compared to employers (35% and 15% respectively).

82% of those with a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more stated their condition reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. These respondents are regarded as the currently disabled population by the Equality Act 2010, as set out in the [Analysis Function's measuring disability guidance](#).

2.2 What were the workplace characteristics of those using the service?

2.2.1. Customer type

88% of respondents were calling as an employee and 12% were calling as an employer.

2.2.2. Employment status

Over 6 in 10 employee respondents (61%) were in full-time employment, with a further 19% in part-time employment. 13% were unemployed and between 1% and 2% were self-employed, agency workers, temporary workers, zero-hours workers, an apprentice, or in another type of employment.

2.2.3. Workplace sector

Over half (53%) of respondents stated that they were calling regarding a private sector organisation, 20% regarding a public sector organisation, 7% for a charity or voluntary sector organisation and 1% from social enterprises. 10% did not know the sector of the organisation they were calling about and 8% preferred not to say.

During the operating year, 3% of the respondents used online apps or websites to find jobs or links to customers, where they are paid by the job (for example a gig economy occupation).

2.2.4. Organisation industry type

Respondents were asked what the organisation or business mainly made or did at the place they worked at the point of calling Acas. The percentage of respondents falling into each industry grouping using Standard Industrial Classification codes are shown in Table 1.

The largest share of employees (18%) and employers (15%) worked in "human health and social work activities". This was followed by "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles" for employees (12%) and "manufacturing" and "accommodation and food service activities" for employers (both 10%).

Table 1: Standard Industrial Classification percentages of employee and employer respondents

Standard Industrial Classification code description	Employee	Employer
Human health and social work activities	18%	15%
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	12%	9%
Transport and storage	8%	4%
Education	8%	8%
Manufacturing	7%	10%
Administrative and support service activities	7%	7%
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	7%	2%
Accommodation and food service activities	6%	10%
Construction	5%	7%
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	5%	6%
Other service activities	4%	5%
Information and communication	3%	5%
Financial and insurance activities	3%	3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	2%	5%
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	1%	1%
Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply	1%	1%
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	1%	0%
Real estate activities	1%	1%
Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods and services-producing activities of households for own use	1%	0%
Mining and quarrying	0%	0%
Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies	0%	0%

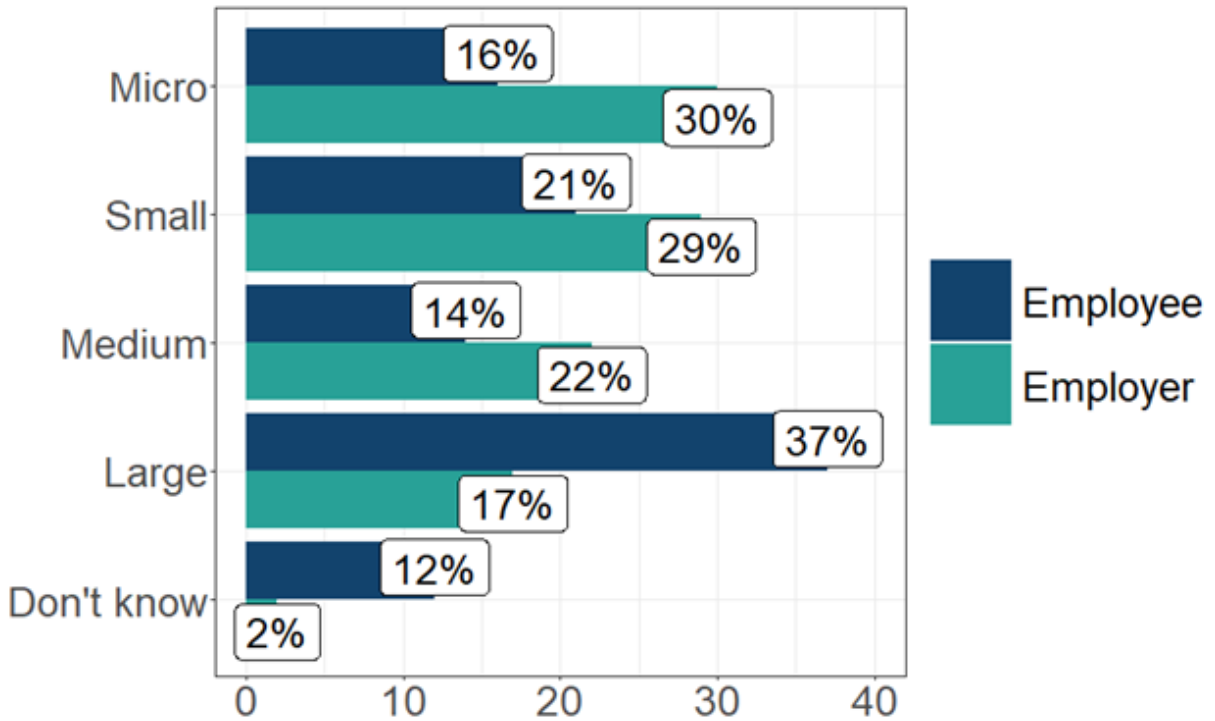
Sample base: 2,092 employee respondents, 293 employer respondents.

2.2.5. Size of organisation

The helpline survey asked respondents the approximate number of employees working for the organisation they were calling about. This report defines small and medium-sized enterprises as encompassing micro (fewer than 10 employees), small (10 to 49 employees) and medium-sized (50 to 249 employees) enterprises. Large enterprises employ more than 250 employees.

Overall, 89% of respondents knew their organisation's size. 55% were calling from small and medium-sized enterprises and 35% from large enterprises. Employees (37%) were significantly more likely to state they were from large enterprises than employers (17%). In contrast, employers (81%) were significantly more likely to be working for small and medium-sized enterprises compared to employees (51%).

Figure 3: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by organisation size



Note: the legend order reflects the order of the data in the chart.

Sample base: 2,181 employee respondents, 306 employer respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of employee and employer respondents by organisation size

	Employee	Employer
Micro	16%	30%
Small	21%	29%
Medium	14%	22%

	Employee	Employer
Large	37%	17%
Don't know	12%	2%

2.2.6. Area of the UK

The largest share of respondents worked in the South East (15%) or London (15%). This was followed by 11% stating they worked in the North West and 10% in the South West.

3. What was the customers' journey to the Acas helpline?

The following section provides insight into the customer's journey to the helpline, for example what they did before calling, including how they attempted to resolve the dispute prior to the call and how they became aware of the helpline.

3.1 What steps did customers take before calling Acas to try and resolve their issues?

3.1.1. Use of alternative resolution

Before calling the helpline, over half of respondents (53%) had visited the Acas website, 31% had sought advice from a friend or family member, and 30% had discussed the issue with their management, employees or HR.

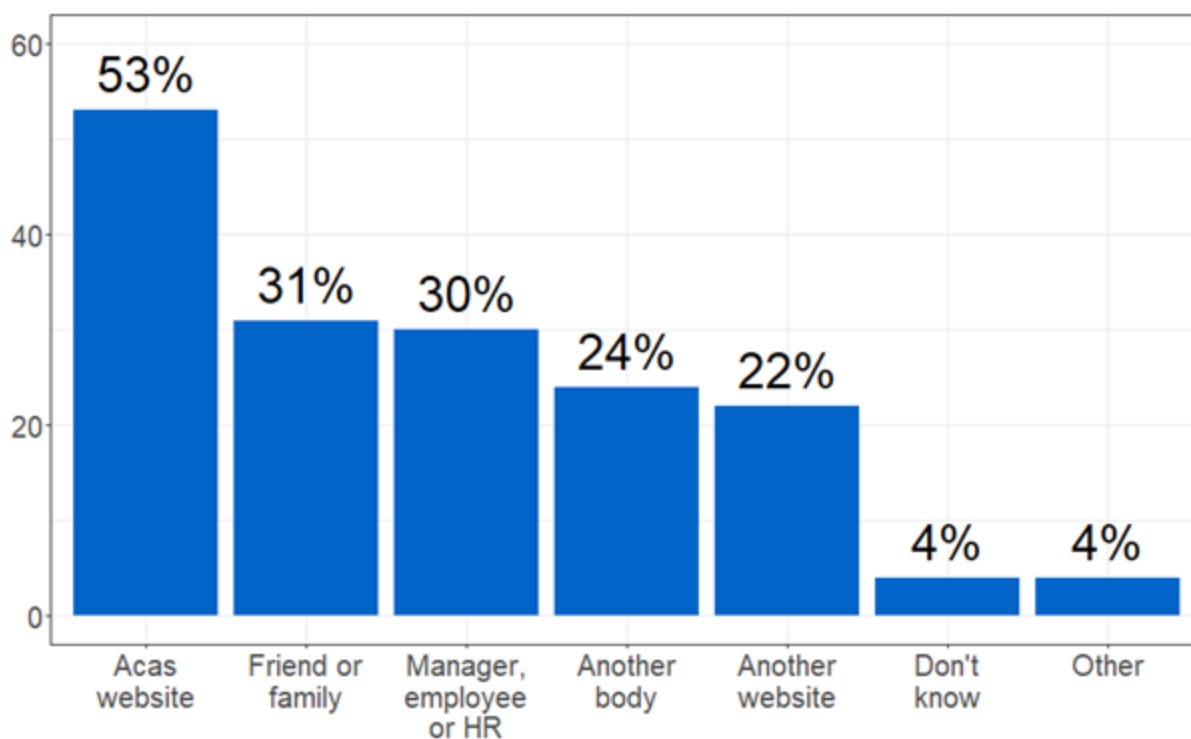
24% had sought advice from another body, for example, a trade union, solicitor, Citizens Advice, online resources or a professional organisation. 22% visited another website in an attempt to answer their query.

Employers were significantly more likely to have visited the Acas website (66% compared with 51% of employees). Employers were significantly more likely to have visited another website (30%) to answer their query compared with 21% of employees.

Conversely, employees were significantly more likely to have sought advice from a friend or family member (34% compared with 11% of employers) or from another body (25% compared with 15% of employers).

Employees were significantly less likely to have discussed the problem with management, employees or HR (29%) than employers (37%).

Figure 4: Other advice sources used by respondents before calling the helpline



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Other advice sources used by respondents before calling the helpline

	Percentage
Acas website	53%
Friend or family	31%
Manager, employee or HR	30%
Another body	24%
Another website	22%
Don't know	4%
Other	4%

3.1.2. Reasons for not visiting the Acas website

The most frequent reasons for not visiting the Acas website prior to calling were: preferring to speak to an adviser (31%) and queries being too specific to be answered by general information (30%).

Employers were more likely to state their query was too specific to be answered by general information (46% compared to 28% of employees).

3.1.3. Reasons for calling after visiting the Acas website

The most frequent reasons for calling after visiting the Acas website were:

- the website only answered part of the customer's question or they needed more information (57%)
- respondents wanted to confirm what they had read or to check their interpretation was correct (36%)
- respondents they did not find any of the information they needed on the website (20%)

3.2 How did customers become aware of the helpline and was the service easy to reach?

3.2.1. How did the customer become aware of the helpline?

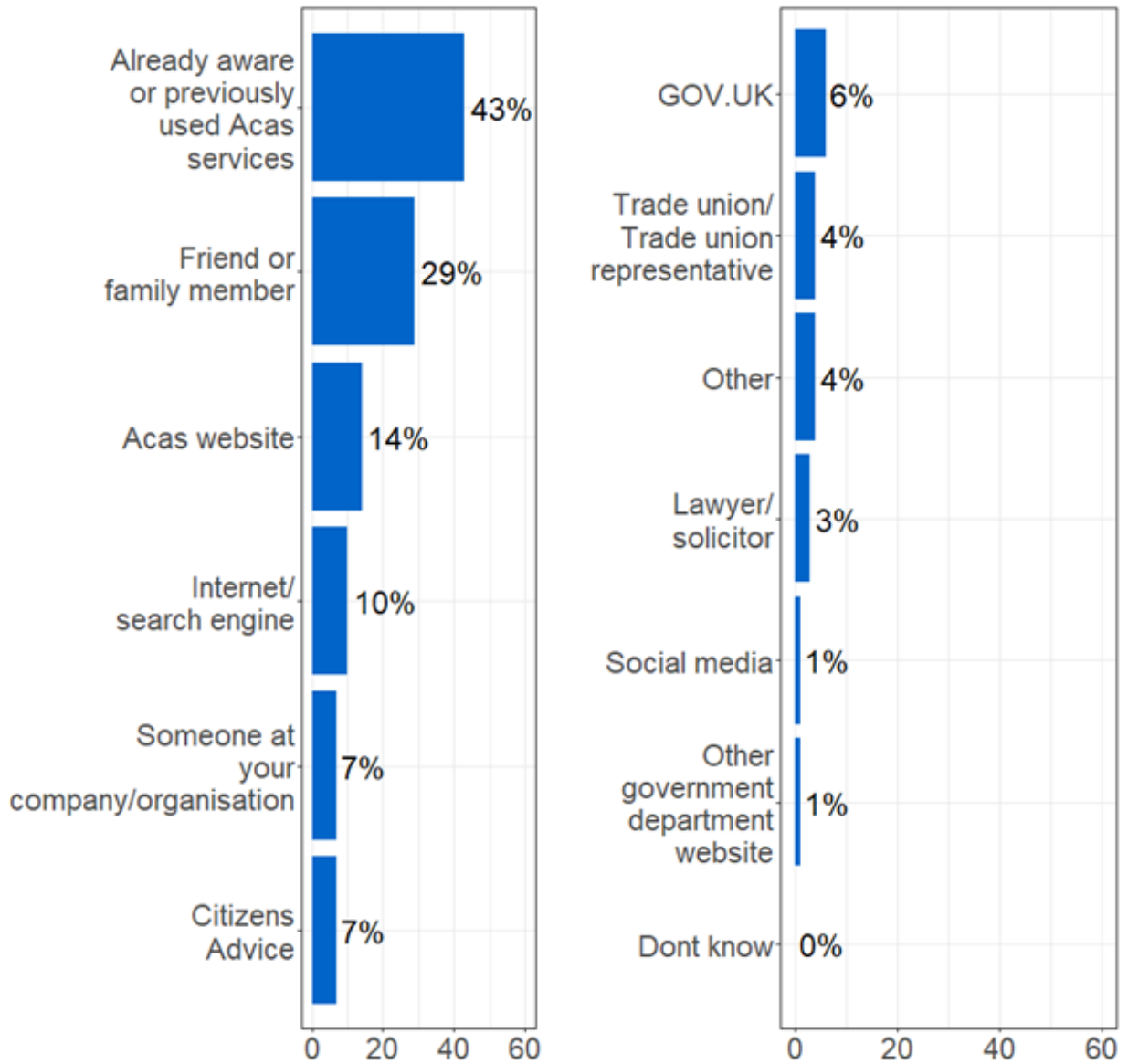
Figure 5 shows how respondents became aware of the helpline.

Respondents were most likely to have heard about the helpline through prior knowledge or having previously used Acas services (43%).

Others found out about the helpline through a recommendation from a friend or family member (29%), through the Acas website (14%) or completed an internet search (10%). Respondents were unlikely to have heard about the helpline via social media, with just 1% stating this was the case.

Employers were more likely to have called the helpline after being already aware or having previously used Acas services (69%) compared to 40% of employees.

Figure 5: Percentages of how respondents became aware of the Acas helpline



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Percentages of how respondents became aware of the Acas helpline

	Percentage
Already aware or previously used Acas services	43%
Friend or family member	29%
Acas website	14%

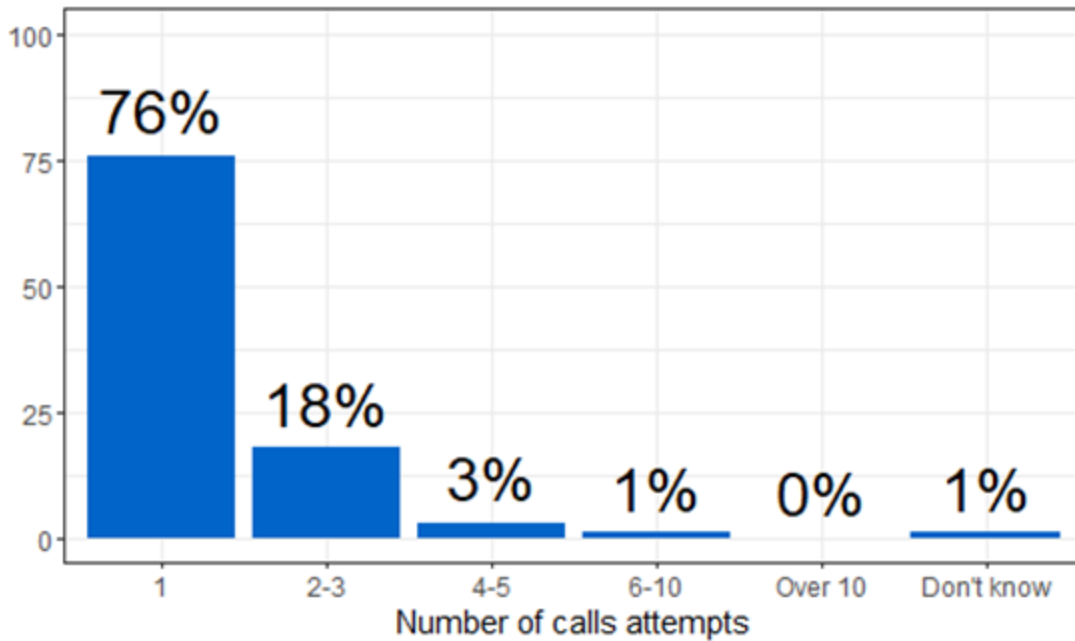
	Percentage
Internet or search engine	10%
Someone at your company or organisation	7%
Citizens advice	7%
GOV.UK website	6%
Trade union or trade union representative	4%
Other	4%
Lawyer or solicitor	3%
Social media	1%
Other government department website	1%
Don't know	0%

3.2.2. Number of call attempts

Respondents were asked how many times in total they had called the helpline before getting through to an adviser. Over 3 in 4 (76%) reached an adviser on the first attempt of calling. A further 18% stated that they called the helpline 2 to 3 times, and 3% stated that they had called 4 to 5 times.

Respondents who reached the helpline on their first attempt were significantly more satisfied with the overall helpline service compared to those who had to call 2 or more times before receiving an answer. 47% of respondents reaching the helpline on the first attempt reported they were extremely satisfied with the overall helpline service compared to 31% who needed 2 or more attempts.

Figure 6: Percentages for the number of call attempts required by respondents before getting through to the helpline



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Percentages for the number of call attempts required by respondents before getting through to the helpline

Number of call attempts	Percentage
1	76%
2 to 3	18%
4 to 5	3%
6 to 10	1%
Over 10	0%
Don't know	1%

3.2.3. Satisfaction with waiting times

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the length of time taken for their call to be answered. The majority of respondents (82%) were satisfied (either extremely, very, or fairly), with 10% stating "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and just 6% being "fairly dissatisfied". Only 2% of respondents stated that they were very or extremely dissatisfied with the length of time it took for their call to be answered.

4. Why did customers call the Acas helpline?

4.1 What was the reason for the call?

4.1.1. Call subject matter

Respondents were able to select multiple options from a list of possible topics for their call to the helpline.

Examples of sub-topics covered by the core subject matter were provided in the survey. However, the respondents are not subject matter experts and therefore some caution should be applied on their choice of call subjects as their declared call topic may not reflect their underlying query.

Table 2: Subject list and examples

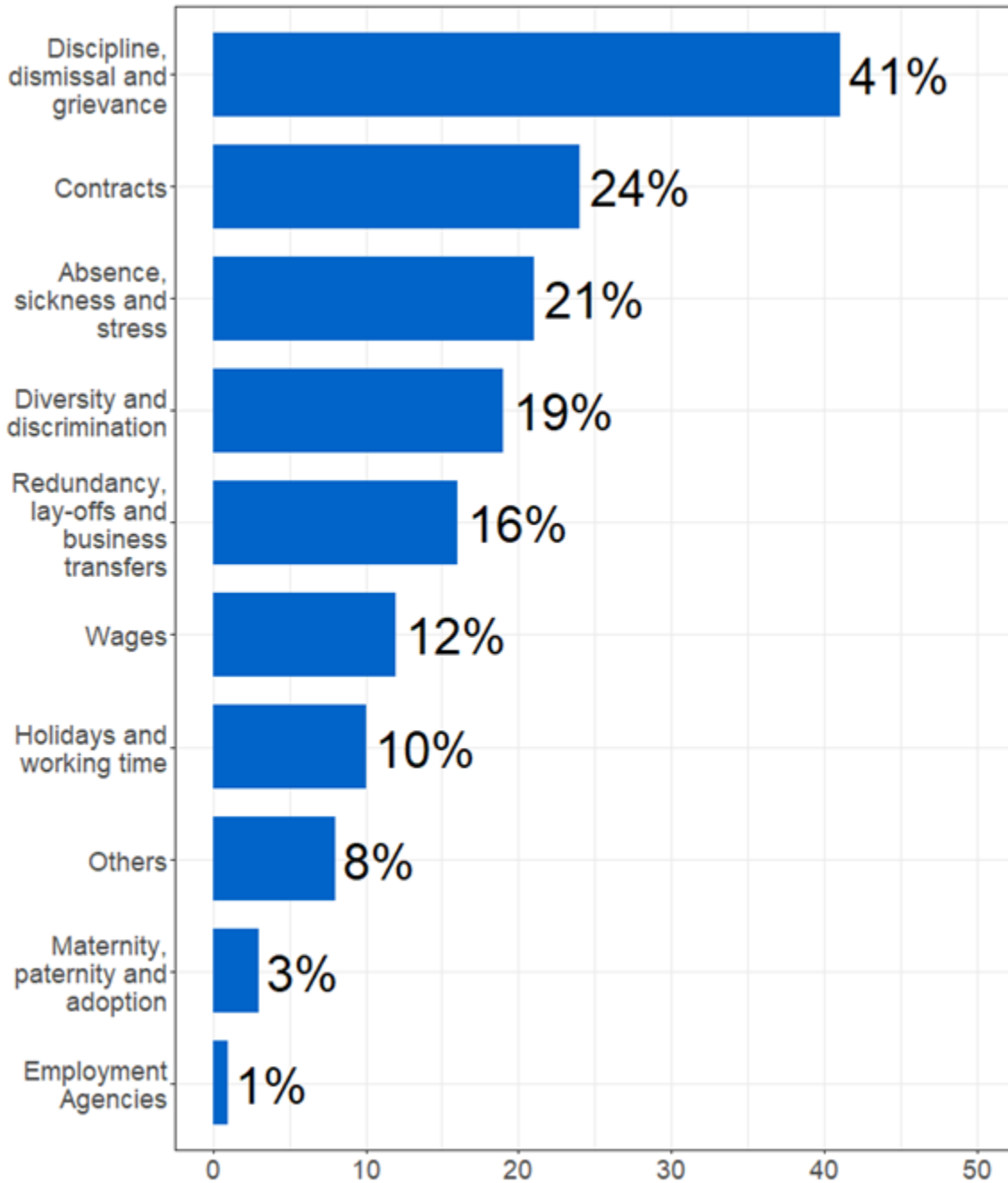
Subject topic	Subject examples
Absence, sickness, and stress	Absence, sick pay, stress, parental leave entitlement, time-off for dependents, return to work, mental health
Contracts	Variation, written statement, probation period, fixed-term contracts, notice period or pay, flexible working regulations, hybrid working, zero-hour contracts, part-time working, gig or platform economy
Diversity and discrimination	Sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity discrimination, sexual harassment, menopause, neurodiversity
Discipline, dismissal, and grievance	Discipline procedure, dismissal, grievance procedure, bullying and harassment, constructive dismissal, investigations, suspension, performance management
Employment agencies	Agency worker regulations, contracts or terms including non-receipt of contract, entertainment or model agencies, Employment Agency Standards (EAS)
Holidays and working time	Holiday entitlement, night working, refusal of entitlement, bank or public holidays, rest breaks, 48-hour week, working time regulations
Maternity, paternity, and adoption	Maternity rights, paternity rights, adoption, shared parental leave, pregnancy in relation to health and safety at work
Redundancy, lay-offs, and business transfers	Redundancy procedure, redundancy payment, non-payment of redundancy, lay-offs or short-time work, TUPE, statutory guarantee pay, insolvency
Wages (including National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage)	National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, non-payment of wages, deduction of wages, written pay statements, agricultural wages
Any other	Cost of living, covid, tribunal judgements, EU exit, employment status, debt bondage, gangmaster licensing, references, physical or mental mistreatment, settlement agreements, whistleblowing, retirement, ID retained, or anything else

41% of respondents were calling about a "discipline, dismissal and grievance" issue. The next most frequent subject matter was "contracts," cited by 24% of respondents, and "absence, sickness and stress", cited by 21% of respondents. All used their own

definitions of the topics.

8% of respondents selected "other" for this question. When asked for further details, a variety of answers were given including (but not limited to) references, performance management and bullying or harassment.

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents calling about each topic



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of respondents calling about each topic

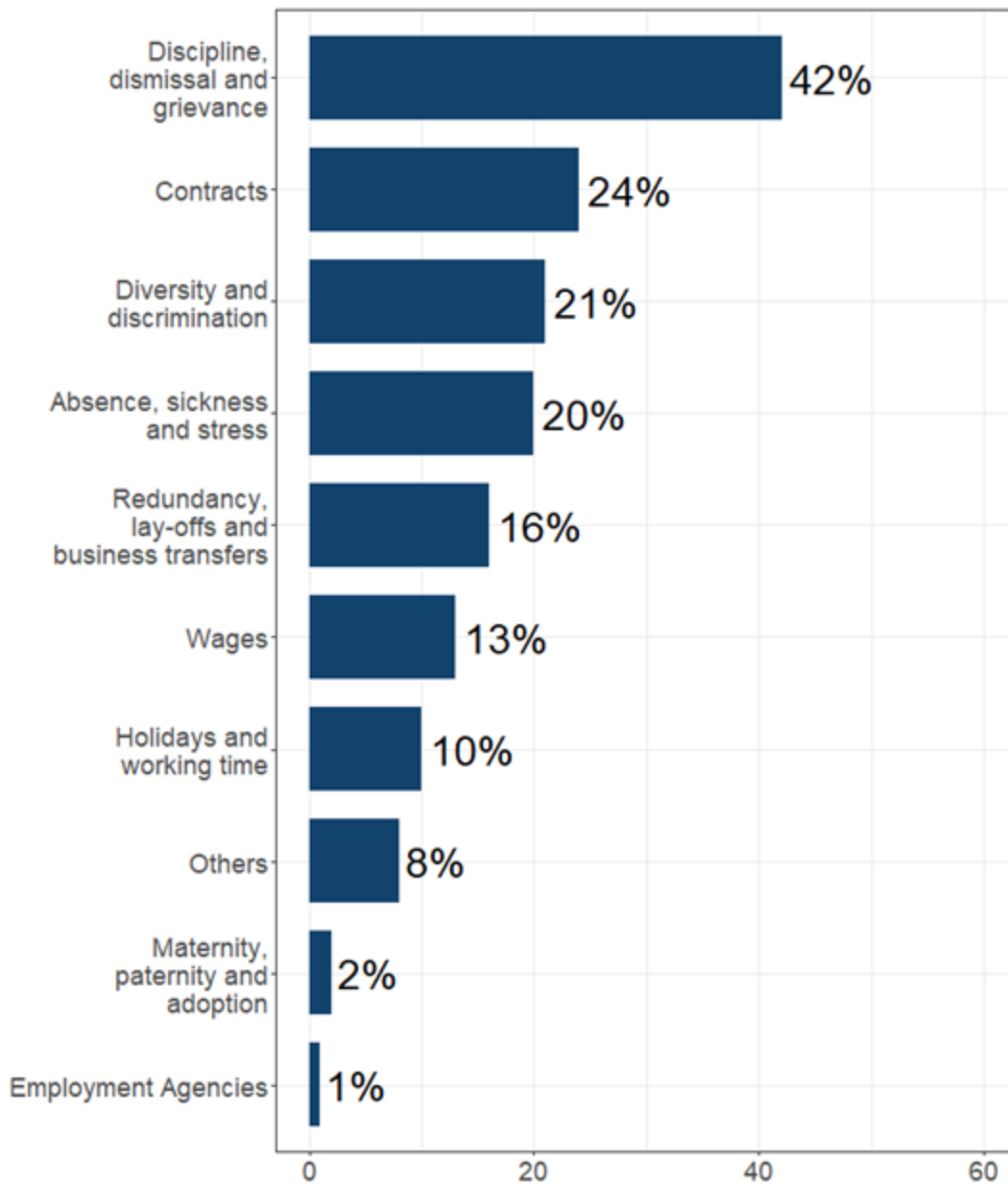
	Percentage
Discipline, dismissal and grievance	41%
Contracts	41%
Absence, sickness and stress	21%
Diversity and discrimination	19%
Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers	16%
Wages	12%
Holidays and working time	10%
Others	8%
Maternity, paternity and adoption	3%
Employment agencies	1%

4.1.2. Call subjects by customer type

Figures 8 and 9 show that employees' (42%) and employers' (35%) most frequent queries were regarding "discipline, dismissal and grievance."

The second most frequent varied by customer type: "contracts" for employees (24%) and "absence, sickness and stress" for employers (28%).

Figure 8: Percentage of employee respondents discussing each subject



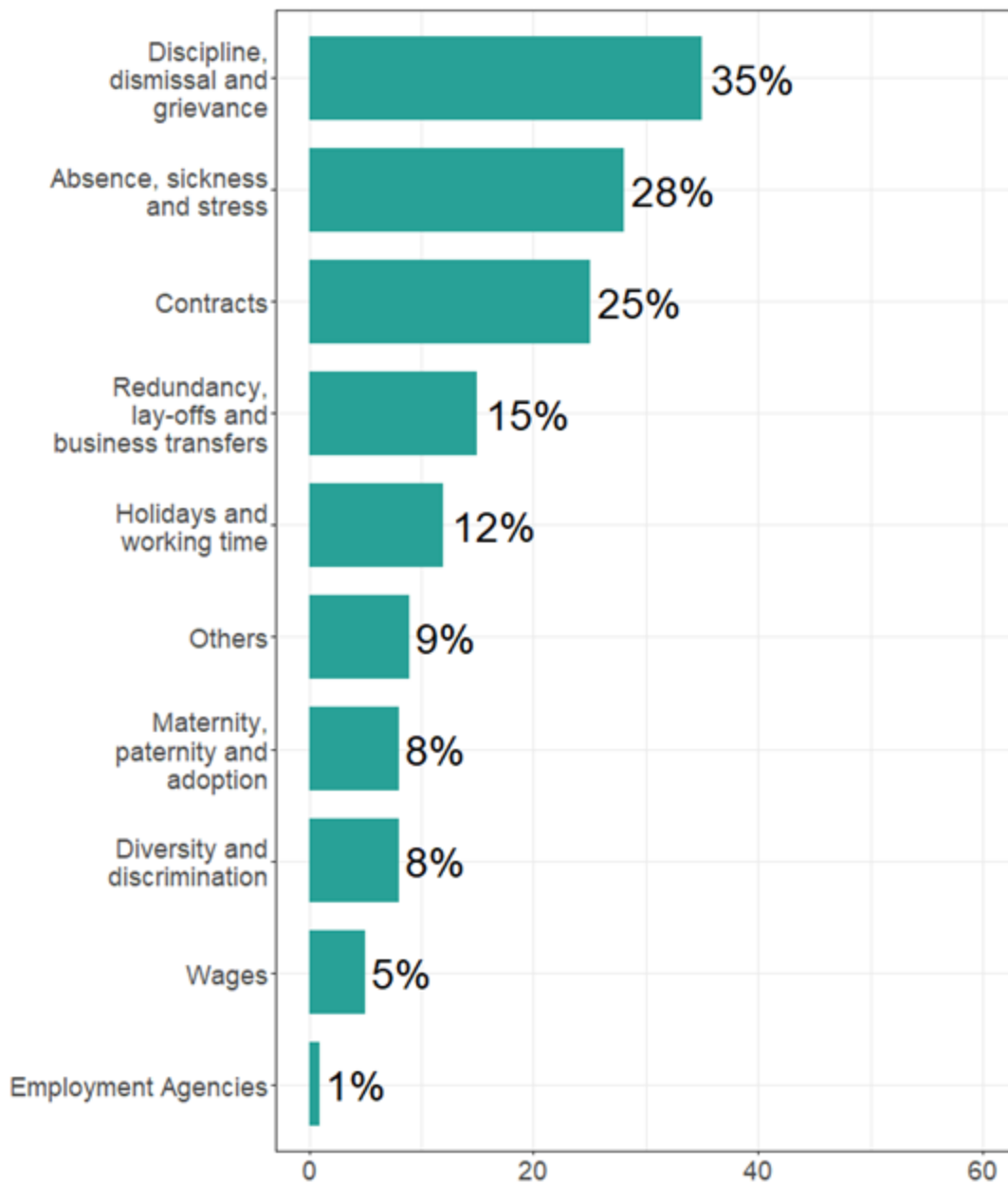
Sample base: 2,181 employee respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of employee respondents discussing each subject

	Employee
Discipline, dismissal and grievance	42%
Contracts	24%
Diversity and discrimination	21%

	Employee
Absence, sickness and stress	20%
Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers	16%
Wages	13%
Holidays and working time	10%
Others	8%
Maternity, paternity and adoption	2%
Employment agencies	1%

Figure 9: Percentage of employer respondents discussing each subject



Sample base: 306 employer respondents.

Table of data: Percentage of employer respondents discussing each subject

	Employer
Discipline, dismissal and grievance	35%
Absence, sickness and stress	28%

	Employer
Contracts	25%
Redundancy, lay-offs and business transfers	15%
Holidays and working time	12%
Others	9%
Maternity, paternity and adoption	8%
Diversity and discrimination	8%
Wages	5%
Employment agencies	1%

4.1.3. Call subjects by dispute resolution stage

During the call, the helpline adviser captured some additional information about the nature of the call. This involved categorising the call according to its "dispute resolution stage" depending on the information provided by the customer. This information about the call was not collected through the survey but added by the helpline adviser.

Table 3: Percentages of respondents by dispute resolution stage

	Dispute resolution stage
Information request – the call is a request for information only, there is no dispute between employee and employer.	
Informal action – there is a dispute between the employee and employer, but they have yet to speak to each other. There is a need to try and resolve the dispute.	
Formal action – the start of a formal procedure on something, for example a disciplinary or grievance process.	
Employment tribunal – internal workplace procedures have been exhausted or the customer insists that they're not going to follow internal procedures.	
Enforcement complaints – where there is a referral to an enforcement body	
Not clear – anything that does not fit into the above categories, or where the helpline adviser does not have enough information to categorise the call.	

Sample base: 2,479 respondents.

4.1.4. Calls related to covid-19 (coronavirus)

During the operating year 2023 to 2024, Acas was monitoring helpline calls related to covid to ensure that it is offering appropriate advice and information to these respondents.

Only 3% of respondents stated that the call related in some way to covid. There has been a decrease in the number of covid-related calls since 2022 to 2023 (down from 5% to 3%).

Customers calling about covid could choose from multiple covid-related issues. The most popular was "mental health and wellbeing" (39%). Others were "physical health and wellbeing" (34%) and "long term sickness" (31%). 28% of respondents stated, "something

else". When asked to provide further detail, common answers referenced pay-related issues and contract changes.

4.1.5. Fire and rehire

The respondents were asked about the practice named 'dismissal and re-engagement' – this is sometimes known as 'fire and rehire' or 'dismiss and rehire.' This occurs when either:

- an employer dismisses an employee and offers them a new contract to work in the same role under new terms and conditions
- an employer tells an employee that they may be dismissed and rehired if they do not agree to new terms and conditions

7% of respondents stated that the call involved discussing the fire and rehire practice.

This practice was most commonly discussed by respondents calling from the "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles" industry (18%), followed by the "human health and social work activities" (16%) and "manufacturing" industries (12%).

4.2 What were the customers' perceptions of the workplace issue?

4.2.1. Calls by levels of urgency, complexity, and stress

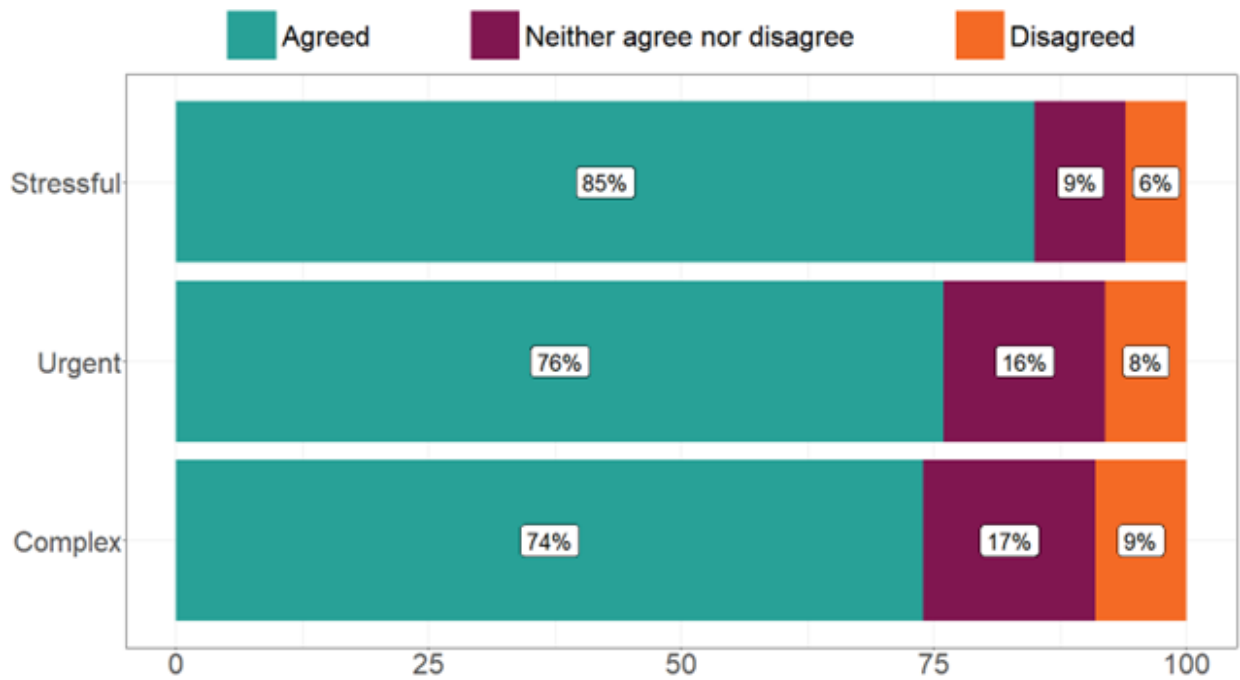
Respondents were asked if their enquiry was stressful, urgent, or complex. Overall, there was a high level of agreement (either "strongly agree" or "agree") with each of these statements (85% stressful, 76% urgent and 74% complex).

17% neither agreed or disagreed that their call was complex, compared to 16% and 9% for urgent and stressful, respectively. No statement had a level of disagreement (either "strongly disagree" or "disagree") above 8%.

Employers were significantly less likely to agree that the issue they were calling about was urgent or stressful compared to employees.

68% of employers either strongly agreed or agreed that their query was urgent, compared with 78% of employees. Whilst 57% of employers either strongly agreed or agreed that their query was stressful, compared with 88% of employees.

Figure 10: Level of agreement on the discussed issue being stressful, urgent, or complex



Note: the legend order reflects the order of the data in the chart.

Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Level of agreement on the discussed issue being stressful, urgent, or complex

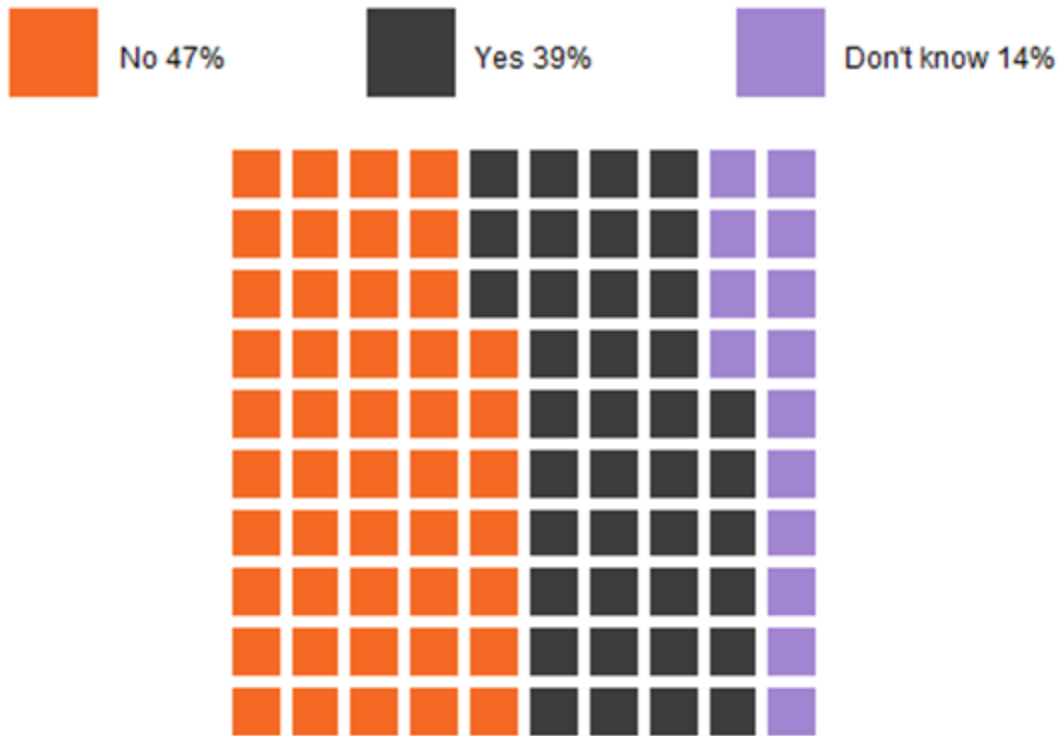
	Agreed	Neither agree nor disagree	
Stressful	85%	9%	6%
Urgent	76%	16%	8%
Complex	74%	17%	9%

4.3 Had the customer been thinking about escalating the issue (employee)?

4.3.1. Employment tribunal claims

39% had been thinking about making a claim to an employment tribunal prior to calling the Acas helpline. 47% said they had not been thinking about making a claim. 14% said they didn't know.

Figure 11: Percentage of employee respondents who had been thinking about making a claim to the employment tribunal or submitting an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas



Note: the legend order reflects the order of the data in the chart.

Sample base: 2,181 employee respondents.

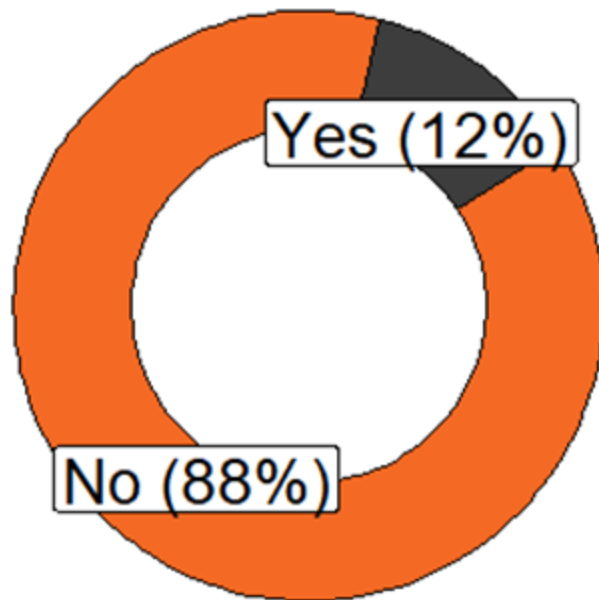
Employees calling the helpline regarding wages (52%), or diversity and discrimination (51%) were more likely to be thinking about making a claim to the employment tribunal (or submitting an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas).

4.4 Had the customer been concerned about the issue escalating (employer)?

4.4.1. Concerns over a claim to the employment tribunal

12% of the employer respondents stated they contacted the helpline because they were concerned that 1 or more employees was considering making a claim to the employment tribunal. 88% answered no to this question.

Figure 12: Percentage of employer respondents concerned that 1 or more employees were considering making a claim to an employment tribunal



Sample base: 306 employer respondents.

Of those employers with concerns about a potential tribunal situation, 66% felt their call to the Acas helpline was "very useful" in helping them deal with the situation in question with a further 29% stating it was "fairly useful". Only 5% felt their call was "not very useful" and no respondents stated their call to the Acas helpline was "not at all useful."

5. What was the customers' experience of the service?

The next section provides insights on the customer experience of the Acas helpline and their satisfaction level with the service.

5.1 How satisfied were customers with the service?

5.1.1. Overall satisfaction

The vast majority of respondents (91%) were satisfied with the overall Acas helpline service. 43% were extremely satisfied. 5% were dissatisfied and 4% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Figure 13: Acas helpline satisfaction levels



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

There is a relationship between call attempts and satisfaction. When the number of call attempts increases from 1, to 2 or 3, the proportion of those who are extremely satisfied significantly dropped from 47% to 31%.

The decrease in overall satisfaction is also significant when 4 or 5 call attempts have been made (28%) and 6 to 10 call attempts (30%) compared to 47% of first-time callers.

5.1.2. Overall satisfaction: Customer type

Employers reported higher levels of satisfaction. 96% of employers were satisfied (extremely, very, or fairly) compared to 90% of employees.

Half of employers (50%) were extremely satisfied compared to 42% of employees.

5.2 What were customers' perceptions of the information received?

5.2.1 Perceptions of the information provided by Acas

Acas's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the helpline during the operating year 2023 to 2024 was "the percentage of users who were able to take clear action following their call to the Acas helpline".

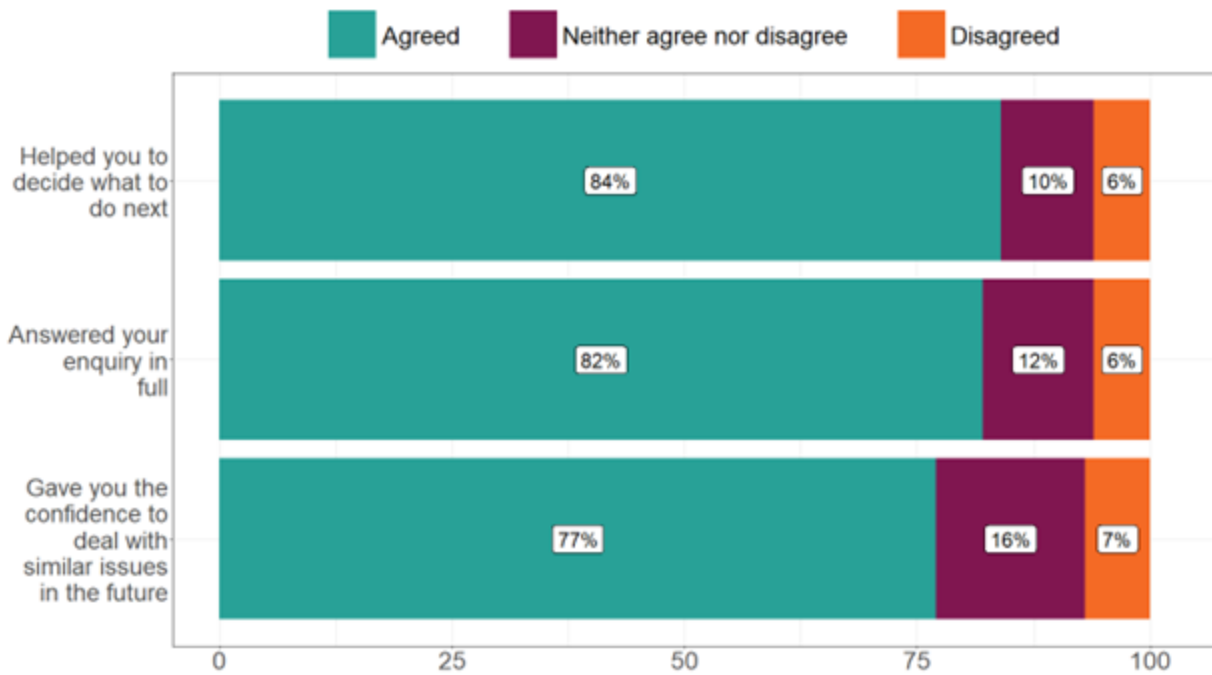
The target was 85%. This was measured by asking respondents if the information provided helped them decide what to do next. This target was missed by 1%: 84% agreed that the information provided by the adviser helped them decide what to do next for their query.

This varied by customer type: 83% of employees and 90% of employers agreed that the information provided by the adviser helped them decide what to do next for their query.

The figure below shows the levels of agreement for 3 statements concerning perceptions of the information provided by the helpline. 82% of respondents agreed the information provided answered their enquiry in full.

There was a slightly lower agreement level (77%) when asked if the information gave them the confidence to deal with similar issues in the future, with 16% stating they "neither agree nor disagree" with this statement.

Figure 14: Respondents' perception of the information provided by the helpline adviser



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Respondents' perception of the information provided by the helpline adviser

	Agreed
Helped you decide what to do next	84%
Answered your enquiry in full	82%
Gave you the confidence to deal with similar issues in the future	77%

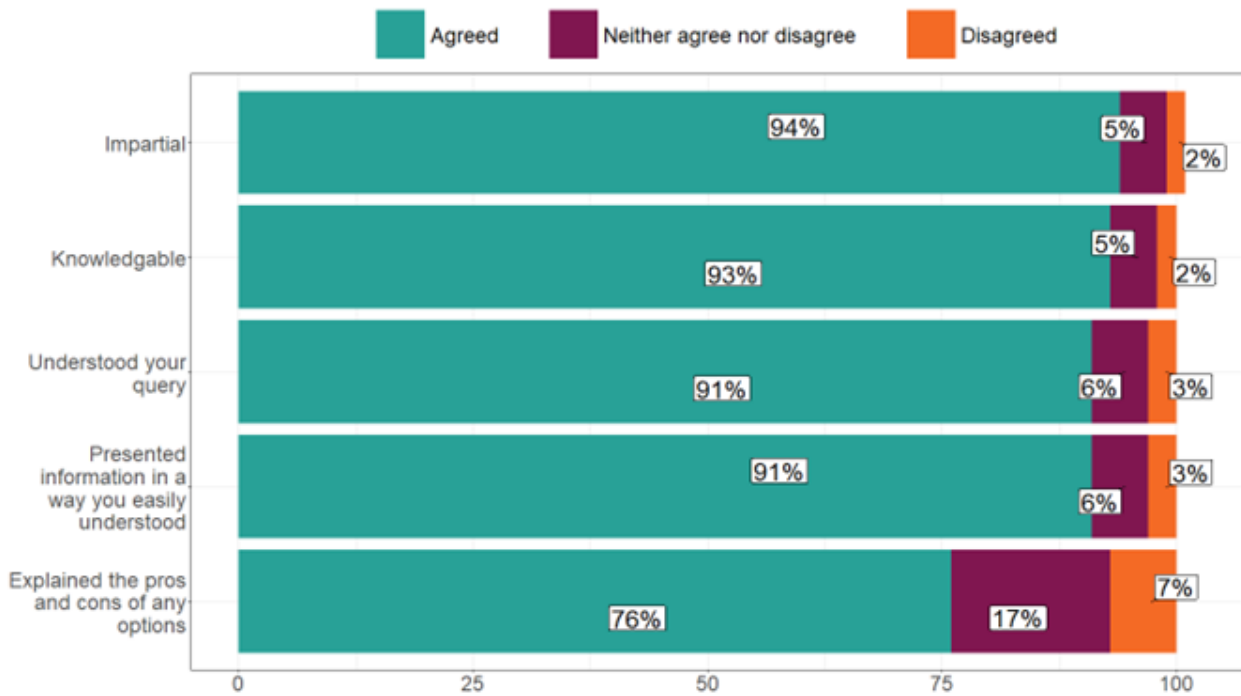
5.3. What were customers' perceptions of Acas advisers?

5.3.1. How did customers perceive the Acas member of staff?

Respondents agreed the Acas member of staff presented the information in an impartial way (94%), was knowledgeable (93%), understood their query (91%) and presented the information in a way they easily understood (91%).

There was a lower level of agreement when asked if the adviser had explained the pros and cons of any options available (76%), with 17% stating they "neither agree nor disagree" with this statement. This lower level of agreement may partly be due to some helpline calls not requiring a discussion of the pros and cons of the advice given.

Figure 15: Level of agreement of respondents with various statements about the Acas member of staff



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Level of agreement of respondents with various statements about their Acas staff

	Agreed	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagreed
Impartial	94%	5%	2%
Knowledgeable	93%	5%	2%
Understood your query	91%	6%	3%
Presented information in a way you easily understood	91%	6%	3%
Explained the pros and cons of any options	76%	17%	7%

6. What were the outcomes and impacts of calling the Acas helpline, and what were customers' next steps?

The helpline survey provides information on the impact of the call and the customers' next steps.

6.1 To what extent were customers able to take action following their call to helpline?

6.1.1. What further action was taken following the helpline call?

88% of respondents took some form of action as a result of their call. Participants were able to select multiple responses from a list provided.

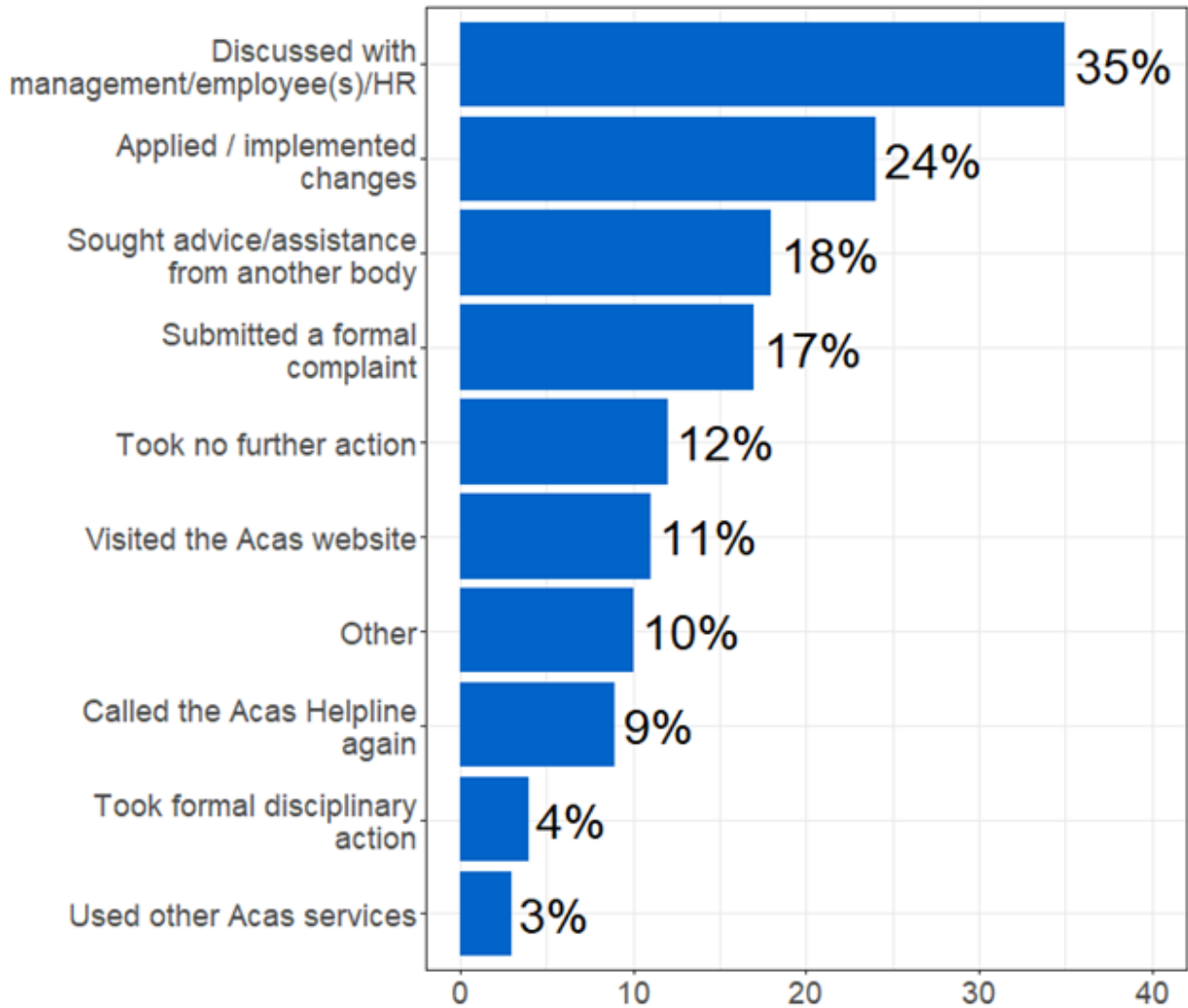
The most frequent response was discussing the problem with management, employees or HR, with 35% respondents taking this action. Employers (42%) were more likely to have taken this action than employees (34%).

The second most frequent action – amongst all respondents – was that they had applied or implemented changes recommended by Acas (24%).

There was a significant difference between customer types: 49% of employers took this action compared to 20% of employees. This may be expected as employer respondents would be more likely to have powers to implement change in their workplace.

Overall, 18% sought advice from another body. Employers (8%) were significantly less likely to take this action than employees (19%).

Figure 16: Type of action taken by respondents after calling the Acas helpline



Sample base: 2,487 respondents.

Table of data: Type of action taken by respondents after calling the Acas helpline

	Percentage
--	------------

Discussed the problem with management, employees or HR	35%
Applied or implemented changes recommended by Acas	24%
Sought advice or assistance from another body	18%
Submitted a formal complaint	17%
Took no further action	12%
Visited the Acas website	11%
Other	10%
Called the Acas helpline again	9%
Took formal disciplinary	4%
Used other Acas services	3%

6.1.2. What advice was sought after calling the helpline?

Table 4 summarises the different sources used by the 448 respondents who sought further advice after calling the Acas helpline. The respondents could choose more than 1 response.

If additional advice was sought, the most common source was a lawyer or solicitor. The second most popular response was "trade union or trade union representative."

Table 4: Bodies or websites contacted by respondents who sought out further advice after calling the Acas helpline

People, bodies or websites
Lawyer or solicitor
Trade Union or Trade Union representative
Citizens Advice
GOV.UK website
Someone at my company or organisation (for example a colleague, manager or internal HR)
Other
Other government websites
Online publications, articles or blogs
Don't know or can't remember

Sample base: 488 respondents.

6.1.3. What were the reasons for seeking additional advice after calling the helpline?

44% who sought additional advice or assistance from another body, did so on the recommendation of the helpline adviser. 36% stated they had always planned to use other sources of information in addition to Acas.

Overall, only 4% of those who sought additional advice stated they didn't understand the information or advice given by the Acas adviser.

6.2 Did the service lead to changes within the customer's organisation?

6.2.1. Did the respondent have responsibility for updating/introducing procedures in their workplace?

75% of employers stated they had responsibility for introducing or changing policies or procedures in their workplace, while just under a fifth (19%) stated that they did not. 5% selected "don't know".

Employers were asked whether the workplace discussed had updated or introduced any policies as a result of their call to the helpline. Almost half (49%) of all employer respondents either had introduced or updated new policies in their workplace or intended to as a result of calling the helpline.

37% of employers stated they did not intend to update or introduce policies as a result of calling the helpline and 15% did not know.

6.3 Has a claim to the employment tribunal or an early conciliation notification been submitted?

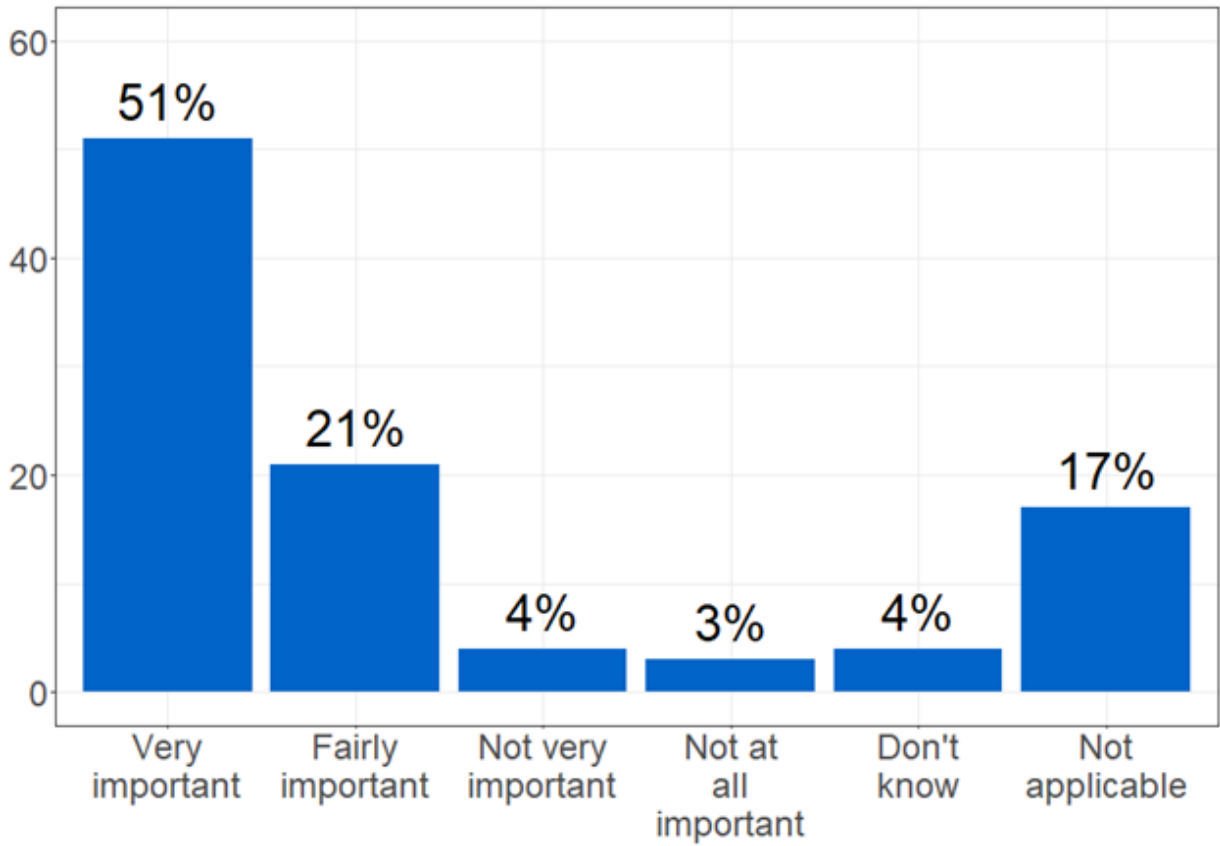
6.3.1. Has the employee respondent made a claim to the employment tribunal or submitted an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas?

At the time of completing the survey, 85% of employees stated that they had not yet made a claim to the employment tribunal or submitted an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas. However, 49% of those were thinking about doing so. Acas does not attach any judgment on these figures.

6.3.2. Did the call help the employee respondent decide whether or not to make a claim?

72% employees felt their call to the Acas helpline was important in helping them make their decision about whether or not to make a claim to an employment tribunal, with over half (51%) feeling it was very important. Only 7% felt the helpline call was "not very important" (4%) or "not at all important" (3%).

Figure 17: The importance of the helpline on employees respondents' decision to make a claim



Sample base: 2,181 employee respondents.

Table of data: The importance of the helpline on employees' decision to make a claim

	Percentage
Very important	51%
Fairly important	21%
Not very important	4%
Not at all important	3%
Don't know	4%
Not applicable	17%

7. How does operating year 2023 to 2024 compare to previous years?

This final section of the report aims to make comparisons on key demographics, service indicators and the customer journey for the last 3 operating years (2021 to 2022, 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024).

7.1 Who used the Acas helpline?

The respondent sex demographic split remained consistent during the last 3 operating years at circa 64% female and 36% male. The mean age for respondents was 48 every year and around 8 in 10 respondents were from a white background for the 3-year period. Those who had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more was 29% 2022 to 2023 and 32% in 2021 to 2022 and 2023 to 2024.

Employees (87% 2021 to 2022, 88% 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024) were more likely to call the helpline each year compared to employers. Over the 3 periods, overall respondents were more likely to be calling about a small and medium-sized enterprise (58% 2021 to 2022, 55% 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024) rather than a large business. Around 8 in 10 respondents were employed, either full or part time, and over half called from a private sector organisation each year.

The top 3 workplace industries for employees were "human health and social work activities", "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles" and "manufacturing" for the operating years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 but manufacturing was not reported as the third most frequent industry in 2023 to 2024 and was replaced with "transport and storage" and "education". For employers, "human health and social work activities" was the most frequent each of the 3 years with "manufacturing," "wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles," "accommodation and food service activities", "administrative and support service activities" and "education" being the second or third most popular during the period.

7.2 What was the customers' journey to the Acas helpline?

The respondents were less likely to have become aware of the Acas website through a recommendation of a friend in 2023 to 2024 than the previous years (33% and 35% in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 respectively). The most common response in 2023 to 2024 was that the respondent had heard about the helpline by being already aware or having previously used Acas services (43%). This was a new response option added during the 2023 to 2024 operating year.

There was an increase in respondents stating they visited the Acas website attempting to answer their query in another way prior to calling the helpline from 45% in 2021 to 2022 to 53% in 2023 to 2024. The most frequent reason each year for not visiting the Acas website was that the respondent preferred to speak to an adviser. For those who visited the website but still called the helpline, 57% stated it was because they found the Acas website only partially answered their question and they needed more information compared to 49% in 2021 to 2022.

7.3 Why did customers call the Acas helpline?

The top 3 subject matter topics covered in respondents' queries remained "discipline, dismissal and grievance", "contracts" and "absence, sickness and stress" over the 3-year period. However, "diversity and discrimination" was the third most popular response for employees during 2023 to 2024 (21%) compared to 19% stating their query included a diversity and discrimination subject matter during 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. As stated above, respondents are not subject matter experts and therefore some caution should be applied on their choice of call subjects. For example, "diversity and discrimination" helpline calls have been rising in number but as a percentage of total calls remain around 13%. Respondents may define discrimination in this context as being treated less favourably than someone else, while our advisers would be defining the subject by protected characteristics.

Between 12 to 14% of employers stated they contacted the helpline because they were concerned that 1 or more employees was considering making a claim to the employment tribunal.

7.4 What was the customers' experience of the service?

Overall respondent satisfaction levels with the helpline service were above 90% for each of the 3 operating years. Employers reported high levels of satisfaction during each of the 3 years (95% in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023, and 96% 2023 to 2024). Employee respondents' satisfaction levels have slightly decreased from 94% in 2021 to 2022 to 90% in 2023 to 2024.

Acas's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the Acas helpline was "the percentage of users who were able to take clear action following their call to the Acas helpline" over the 3-year period. The target has stayed at 85%. Acas did not reach its target Key Performance Indicators in 2023 to 2024, achieving 84% compared to 88% and 87% in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023, respectively.

7.5 What were the outcomes and impacts of calling the Acas helpline, and what were customers' next steps?

The most popular response after calling the helpline was discussing the problem with management employees or HR with 38% in 2021 to 2022, 35% in 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024 stating they took this action. Around half of employers stated their organisation either had or intended to update or introduce any policies or procedures as a result of their call to the helpline (55% in 2021 to 2022, 52% in 2022 to 2023 and 49% in 2023 to 2024).

When the respondent sought advice after the call, employees tended to contact either a lawyer, their trade union, Citizens Advice or the GOV.UK website each operating year. For employers, a lawyer or GOV.UK were also popular responses but someone at my company or organisation (for example a colleague, manager, or internal HR) was cited more in 2023 to 2024 (28%) compared to 21% in 2021 to 2022 and 15% in 2022 to 2023.

For each operating year, 72% on employees stated the call to the helpline was important (either very or fairly) in making their decision on whether to make a claim to the employment tribunal (or submit an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas). The 15% who had submitted a claim to the employment tribunal (or submit an early conciliation notification of a claim to Acas) in 2023 to 2024 is on par with previous operating years (16% 2021 to 2022 and 14% 2022 to 2023). Just under half of employee respondents stated they have not submitted a claim or notification but were thinking about it. (47% in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 and 49% in 2023 to 2024).

References

Government Analysis Function, "[Gender identity data harmonised standard](#)", 16 July 2020. Accessed 19 September 2024.

Government Analysis Function, "[Measuring disability for the Equality Act 2010 harmonisation guidance](#)", 25 June 2019. Accessed 30 May 2024.