

# Acas individual mediation service monitoring report 2024 to 2025

8 July 2025

## Executive summary

Individual mediation is a paid-for Acas service supplying an Acas mediator to work within a company to attempt to resolve a specific disagreement, usually between 2 people, known as participants. The service is usually contracted by a commissioner, usually someone in HR or a senior leader, who arranges for Acas to provide individual mediation. There is more detail on the process and potential outcomes and impacts in the theory of change (Appendix 2).

We ask all participants and commissioners to complete a survey about their experience of individual mediation once the process is complete. This gathers feedback on the service, including whether it achieved its objectives, and areas where Acas can improve.

This report is based on data collected in those surveys during the 2024 to 2025 operational year (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025). In total, 98 mediation participants (32% of 311 participants) and 38 mediation commissioners (23% of 168 commissioners) responded to the survey.

The number and percentage of commissioner respondents has increased compared to previous years. The number of participants responding to the survey has increased compared to previous years, as has the overall number of participants in individual mediation. As a result, the percentage responding to the survey is similar to previous years. The increase in participants in individual mediation is likely due to Acas employing 2 dedicated full-time mediators at the start of 2024 to 2025.

## Main findings

Across participants and commissioners, responses were generally positive, and very similar in 2024 to 2025 compared to 2023 to 2024.

### Satisfaction

- satisfaction levels with the service were high for commissioners (82% versus 72% last year) and participants (77% versus 75%) – participants also rated the mediators highly (86% fairly or very good versus 85%)
- satisfaction with the agreement reached was much higher for the 74% of participants who reached a written agreement (74%; 83% last year) than those who did not (20%; 43% last year) – satisfaction for those who did not reach a written agreement was the lowest of the last 5 years
- 79% (83% last year) of commissioners and 69% (75% last year) of participants said they would use or take part in mediation again
- participants were fairly evenly split in reporting mediation took place online via video call (such as Teams or Zoom) and in their employers' offices, though venue satisfaction was much higher for offices (87%) than video (67%)

## Timing

- half of commissioners (54%; 65% last year) said it was too soon to tell if objectives had been achieved – Acas is exploring options to improve data around this topic
- half of mediation participants (54%; 59% last year) felt that mediation took place too late – 50% (52% last year) said the issue had been going on for a year or more before mediation

## Outcomes

- nearly all commissioners (92%; 89% last year) said that an objective of mediation was 'improving the working relationships between the individuals concerned'
- two-fifths of commissioners (39%) said that 'discussing other options' was not something they needed from mediation, an increase from previous years (11% last year)

## Implications for Acas and further research

For some survey questions it would be helpful to know the reasons behind the responses. Acas should conduct further research, including qualitative work with individual mediation users, to explore these in more depth.

There is a clear desire amongst participants for earlier mediation. Acas should explore how future commissioners can be encouraged towards earlier intervention and involvement of Acas.

The time gap between mediation finishing and the survey being sent is too short for outcomes to develop for some respondents. Acas is exploring how to mitigate this issue, including trialling a delay in sending surveys and the potential for follow-up qualitative work.

The use of digital mediation has been declining for multiple years. In 2024 to 2025, it was broadly equal to the use of employers' offices, but satisfaction is lower for digital mediation. If this shift becomes a trend, Acas will look at conducting further research into the reasons for lower satisfaction levels with digital mediation, and what we can do to change this.

Although 75% of participants rated mediators good or very good for finding a solution and understanding the other person's view, these scores were lower than other aspects of the mediator's role. This is likely linked to the complexity of these aspects (compared to, for example, listening to concerns or being impartial), but Acas should consider the reasons behind this, potentially through further, qualitative research, and what steps Acas might take to increase these scores.

This year saw a large increase in commissioners saying that they did not need to discuss options other than mediation with their mediators. If this increase continues, Acas may need to explore the reasons for this in more depth.

## 1. Introduction

This report is based on data collected via surveys completed by commissioners of, and participants in, Acas individual mediations during the 2024 to 2025 operational year (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025). In total, 98 mediation participants (32% of 311 participants) and 38 mediation commissioners (23% of 168 commissioners) responded to the survey.

Where questions were asked of both commissioners and participants, results are reported for both groups.

Due to the relatively small number of mediations and completed surveys, findings and any comparisons to previous individual mediation evaluations should be treated with some caution. Because the base numbers for some questions are particularly low, caution is advised when interpreting the percentages due to the small numbers used in the percentage calculations. All results should be treated as indicative, as no significance tests have been conducted.

Figures and tables are used throughout the report to help the reader understand the findings. Although occasional anomalies appear due to rounding differences, these never exceed plus or minus 1%.

Across both commissioner and participant surveys, results are similar to previous years. We have only noted where there are differences compared to previous years in this report.

## 2. Who uses the individual mediation service?

Just under three-quarters (71%) of the 38 commissioners were in HR roles, similar to previous years. Most of the remainder (21%) were managers – again consistent with previous years. Around two-thirds of participants participated in mediation as employees (62%), with most of the remainder participating as managers.

The large majority of commissioners (92%) said that mediation was between 2 people. This has been consistently above 80% for the last 5 years.

Around half of the commissioners (47%) said that mediation was between an employee and their line manager. This is similar to previous years, except 2023 to 2024, when this group accounted for 67%.

Most of the remaining commissioners said mediation was between either an employee and another individual who has authority over them, or 2 individuals where there is no authority relationship.

Table 1: Parties in mediation, 2024 to 2025

Parties	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
An employee and their line manager	18	47%
An employee and another individual who has authority over them in the organisation	8	21%
Two individuals where there is no authority relationship	8	21%
Other	2	5%
A group of employees and another individual who has authority over them in the organisation	1	3%
An individual and a group where there is no authority relationship	1	3%
2 groups of employees	0	Not applicable
A group of employees and their line manager	0	Not applicable
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>

Participant respondents were asked about their demographic characteristics, full details of which are in Appendix 1:

- three-quarters were female
- the most common age groups were 45 to 54 (33%) and 55 to 64 (23%), reflecting the age of users of other Acas services such as the Acas helpline

- the majority were from a white background (83%)
- half were of no religion (48%) followed by Christian (36%), bringing the profile back in line with past years after 2023 to 2024 reversed this
- the majority were heterosexual or straight (84%)
- almost all of those who responded said their gender matched their sex at birth
- the large majority spoke English as their first or main language (93%)
- around two-thirds (64%) had no long-term health condition
- of the 25 (26%) who said they have a long-term health condition, 44% said it reduced their ability to carry out activities a little, followed by 32% who said it did not reduce their ability at all

In 2024 to 2025, we asked participants and commissioners, for the first time, about the size and sector of their workplace. Both participants (65%) and commissioners (58%) were more likely to be from large organisations (250 or more employees) than small or medium (1 to 249 employees). This is similar to the profile of users of collective conciliation, but Acas helpline users are more likely to be from smaller organisations. Around a tenth of participants did not know the size of their organisation.

Of those who supplied the sector of their workplace, the largest group of participant respondents were from public sector organisations (56%); for commissioners, this was the private sector (40%). For both collective conciliation and Acas helpline services, the private sector makes up the majority of users.

Participants mainly worked in London (22%) followed by Scotland (18%) and South West (14%) regions.

For both groups, the most common industry of their workplace was education (23% of participants; 28% of commissioners). A fifth (21%) of participants worked in 'Human health and social work activities' (the most common industry for Acas helpline callers). 'Public administration and defence including social security' was also common for both groups (17% of participants, 11% of commissioners).

### 3. What is the context in which people come to individual mediation?

A third of commissioners (37%) said the issue had been going on for a year or more prior to mediation, with a further quarter (26%) saying the issue had been going on for 6 months to a year.

Participants reported similar figures: 50% said the issue had been going on for a year or more, and 24% for between 6 months and a year.

About half of participants (54%) felt that mediation took place too late. A quarter (26%) felt it was at about the right time, and 19% said that they did not know. Only 1% thought it was too early.

More than half (59%) of all participants were allowed to make their own decision about whether to participate. This was higher than 4 of the past 5 years. Around a quarter (23%) were encouraged to take part but could have said no, and 16% felt pressured to take part.

Of the 16% who felt pressured to take part, almost all reported that most of the pressure came from their employer.

According to commissioners, the most common step prior to mediation was an informal grievance meeting (34%), followed by a formal grievance meeting (26%). Around a third (29%) had taken none of the listed steps.

Table 2: Steps taken prior to mediation, 2024 to 2025

Steps taken	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
An informal disciplinary meeting	1	3%

Steps taken	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
An informal grievance meeting	13	34%
A formal disciplinary meeting	1	3%
A formal grievance meeting	10	26%
The final stage of a disciplinary or grievance procedure	6	16%
The involvement of trade union or other employee representatives	6	16%
An employment tribunal case	1	3%
None of the above	11	29%

Note: respondents can select multiple steps, so the percentage total will not sum to 100.

#### 4. How effectively is the individual mediation service being delivered?

Understanding the objectives of people who use individual mediation is key to assessing the effectiveness of the service. Almost all commissioners (92%) said that improving working relationships between the individuals concerned was an objective of mediation. Next most common was improving working relationships in the organisation (32%).

Table 3: Mediation objectives, 2024 to 2025

Mediation objectives	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Improving the working relationship between the individuals concerned	35	92%
Improving the working relationships in the organisation	12	32%
Preventing a resignation	7	18%
Preventing an employment tribunal case	6	16%
Facilitating a return to work from absence	5	13%
Preventing long-term absence	2	5%
Preventing a dismissal	1	3%
Other	2	5%

Note: respondents can select multiple objectives, so the percentage total will not sum to 100.

Across all objectives, the most common response from commissioners was that it was too soon to tell whether objectives have been met (54%). The survey is typically sent in the month after mediation finishes. Acas is currently trialling delaying the survey by an additional month to assess if that increases the volume of respondents able to answer this question definitively.

Only 6% of responses indicated that one of their objectives was not met at all. 3% said that the objective of 'improving the working relationships between the individuals concerned' was not met. 1% each said that the objectives of 'improving working relationships in the organisation' and 'preventing long-term absence' were not met.

Participants were also asked to what extent issues were resolved, with no option for 'too soon to tell'. Just under half (45%) said issues were partly resolved and a slightly higher share of the remainder said issues were completely resolved (30%) than not at all resolved (26%).

Half (53%) of commissioners felt that the situation had improved since mediation. A third (32%) said they did not know whether the situation had changed, likely reflecting responses that it is 'too soon to tell' if objectives have been met.

Three-quarters (74%) of participants said they reached a written agreement, the highest percentage of the last 5 years. Of the 73 participants who reached a written agreement, 74% were either fairly or very satisfied with the agreement reached. This is a small drop from previous years, when around 85 to 90% were fairly or very satisfied.

By contrast, only 20% of those who did not reach a written agreement were fairly or very satisfied. This is a shift from previous years, when more than 40% of those who did not reach a written agreement were fairly or very satisfied.

In comments, participants had mixed feelings about the value of the agreement, particularly whether their organisation would stick to it, as some felt mediation was used as a 'tick box' exercise by their employers. Despite this, people valued being able to share their experiences in an impartial setting.

The majority of participants (76%) were clear on the next steps following mediation.

## 5. How satisfied are users with the individual mediation service?

Overall satisfaction with the mediation service from commissioners was 82% and slightly lower for participants at 77%.

Commissioners were generally positive about the service, with an average of 86% rating it as fairly or very good. Three aspects were rated particularly highly, with 95% saying these were fairly or very good:

- promptness of Acas's response to contact
- understanding the issue that caused the commissioner to seek mediation
- explaining the mediation service

A large percentage of commissioners (39%) said that 'discussing other options' was not applicable to them – this is a large increase from an average of 15% in previous years. Unfortunately, the survey does not allow us to review potential reasons for this shift. However, the participant comments saying that they felt mediation was a 'tick box exercise' may be related.

Participants were asked to rate their Acas mediator on various criteria, with an average of 86% rating the mediator as fairly or very good. 'Explaining the process of mediation' (98%) and 'explaining the role of the mediator' (96%) scored particularly highly. 'Helping to find a solution to the problem' and 'helping to understand the other person's point of view' scored lowest, but still well, at 74% each.

When free text comments mentioned the mediator, these were generally positive, with one saying the mediator was "nothing short of excellent", and another that the experience was so successful the respondent decided to train as a mediator. A small number of commenters felt that the mediator did not do enough to enforce the ground rules agreed at the start of the session.

The majority of commissioners (79%) said they would use individual mediation again. However, for the first time since 2020 to 2021, some said they would not (8%). Reasons for this were mixed, but all 3 respondents were fairly or very dissatisfied overall with the service. A smaller percentage of participants (69%) said they would take part in mediation again; this is a small fall compared to most previous years.

The half of those who gave details of reluctance to repeat the experience mostly cited the following:

- the time it took for mediation to take place after the process started
- feeling that the mediator sided with the other party
- feeling that mediation did not help resolve the issue, sometimes making it worse

The majority of commissioners (82%) were either fairly or very satisfied with the value for money of the mediation service.

A large majority (95%) of commissioners said they received enough information prior to mediation, an increase from 78% in 2023 to 2024 (the first year this question was asked to commissioners). A large majority (95%) of participants also said they received enough information.

For the first time post-lockdown, participants were fairly evenly split between attending mediation via video link (37%) and at their employer's premises (39%), likely due in part to Acas hiring 2 full-time digital mediators. Previously, attendance at the employer's premises for mediation was much more common. Around four-fifths (79%) of participants were satisfied with the venue for mediation. Satisfaction was higher for the employer's premises (87%) than via video link (67%), mostly due to participants not feeling video link was appropriate for mediation.

Almost all participants (97%) said they were able to take breaks during the session, and the majority (90%) felt that there were about the right number of breaks.

## 6. Conclusions

Generally, both participants and commissioners were satisfied with their experience of Acas individual mediation, and would take part in it again if the need arose. After declining for both groups in 2023 to 2024, this is now back in line with previous years.

There is evidence from participants that individual mediation takes place too late in the process. Half of respondents reported that the concerns that mediation covered had existed for more than a year before the process began. Around half of respondents said that mediation took place too late.

Responses around the success of mediation in resolving issues and achieving outcomes suggest that the survey is either sent too early, or would benefit from a follow-up.

Satisfaction with the outcome of the individual mediation was much higher for participants with a written agreement than without. This may be linked to some concerns that employers would not stick to what was agreed in mediation. A written agreement offers an additional level of formality that may increase confidence in actions being completed.

### Implications for Acas and further research

For some survey questions it would be helpful to know the reasons behind the responses. Acas should conduct further research, including qualitative work with individual mediation users, to explore these in more depth.

There is a clear desire amongst participants for earlier mediation. Acas should explore how future commissioners can be encouraged towards earlier intervention and involvement of Acas.

The time gap between mediation finishing and the survey being sent is too short for outcomes to develop for some respondents. Acas is exploring how to mitigate this issue, including trialling a delay in sending surveys and the potential for follow-up qualitative work.

The use of digital mediation has been declining for multiple years. In 2024 to 2025, it was broadly equal to the use of employers' offices, but satisfaction is lower for digital mediation. If this shift becomes a trend, Acas will look at conducting further research into the reasons for lower satisfaction levels with digital mediation, and what we can do to change this.

Although 75% of participants rated mediators good or very good for finding a solution and understanding the other person's view, these scores were lower than other aspects of the mediator's role. This is likely linked to the complexity of these aspects (compared to, for example, listening to concerns or being impartial). Acas should consider the reasons behind this, potentially through further, qualitative research, and what steps we might take to increase these scores.

This year saw a large increase in commissioners saying that they did not need to discuss options other than mediation with their mediators. If this increase continues, Acas may need to explore the reasons for this in more depth.

## Appendix 1: Participant profile

Table 4: Gender

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Female	76	78%
Male	20	20%
Prefer not to say	0	Not applicable
Did not answer	2	2%

Table 5: Gender identity matches sex at birth

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Matches	94	96%
Does not match	1	1%
Prefer not to say	0	Not applicable
Did not answer	3	3%

Table 6: Age group

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
16 to 24	0	Not applicable
25 to 34	6	6%
35 to 44	21	21%
45 to 54	32	33%
55 to 64	23	23%
65 and over	2	2%

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Did not answer	14	14%

Table 7: Ethnicity

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
White	81	83%
Black, African, Black British or Caribbean	6	6%
Asian or Asian British	2	2%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2	2%
Other ethnic groups	3	3%
Prefer not to say	2	2%
Did not answer	2	2%

Table 8: Religion

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
No religion	47	48%
Christian	35	36%
Muslim	2	2%
Buddhist	1	1%
Sikh	1	1%
Any other religion	2	2%
Prefer not to say	6	6%
Did not answer	4	4%

Note: no respondents stated that they were Hindu or Jewish.

Table 9: Sexual orientation

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Heterosexual or straight	82	84%
Gay or lesbian	4	4%
Bisexual	2	2%
Other	1	1%

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Prefer not to say	6	6%
Did not answer	3	3%

Table 10: English spoken as first or main language

	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
English spoken as first language	91	93%
English not spoken as first language	4	4%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Did not answer	2	2%

Table 11: Health conditions or illnesses

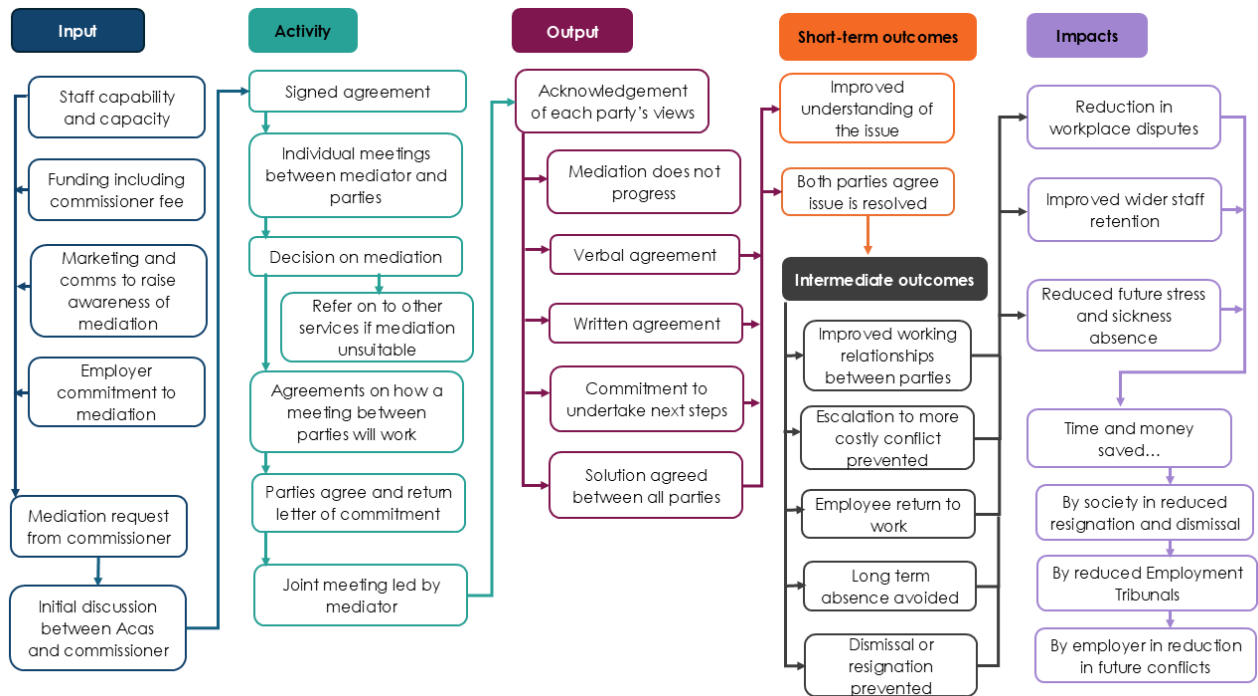
Physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting 12 months or more	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Yes	25	26%
No	63	64%
Do not know	1	1%
Prefer not to say	7	7%
Did not answer	2	2%

Table 12: Impact of condition

Condition reduces ability to carry out day-to-day activities	Number of participants	Percentage of all participants
Yes, a lot	6	24%
Yes, a little	11	44%
Not at all	8	32%

## Appendix 2: Theory of Change

Edit mediaFigure 1: Theory of change for individual mediation



## Theory of Change text description

The Theory of Change model shows how different inputs and activities around mediation can lead to certain outputs. These in turn lead to short-term and intermediate outcomes, as well as wider impacts.

The process starts with 'inputs'. These are:

- staff capability and capacity
- funding including commissioner fee
- marketing and communications to raise awareness of mediation
- employer commitment to mediation

These inputs could lead to:

- a mediation request from the commissioner
- an initial discussion between Acas and the commissioner

The initial discussion brings about a sequence of activities:

1. Signed agreement.
2. Individual meetings between mediator and parties.
3. Decision on mediation.
4. The decision results in either:
  - a referral to other services if mediation unsuitable (no further activity)
  - a decision shared on how a meeting will work
5. Parties agree and return the letter of commitment.
6. Joint meeting led by mediation.

The joint meeting could lead to the first 'output', which is an acknowledgement of each party's views.

Then one or more of the following outputs could happen:

- mediation does not progress (no further output)
- verbal agreement
- written agreement
- commitment to undertake next steps
- solution agreed between all parties leading to short-term outcomes

A solution agreed between all parties could lead to these short-term outcomes:

- improved understanding of the issue
- both parties agree issue is resolved

These can bring about one or more of the following intermediate outcomes:

- improved working relationships between parties
- escalation to more costly conflict prevented
- employee return to work
- long-term absence avoided
- dismissal or resignation prevented

Leading to wider impacts:

- reduction in workplace disputes
- improved wider staff retention
- reduced future stress and sickness absence

These impacts can mean time and money saved:

- by society in reduced resignation and dismissal
- by reduced employment tribunals
- by employer in reduction in future conflicts