

Data quality for Acas helpline data

20 December 2024

Introduction

The Acas helpline is for anyone who needs employment law or workplace advice, including employers, employees, and workers. The helpline provides confidential, free advice covering:

- any work-related problems or questions
- what the law says and how it relates to a given situation
- good practice at work
- potential options including any risks or benefits

This background quality report relates to our statistical release about:

- the characteristics of those calling the Acas helpline
- why people are calling the Acas helpline
- any differences between why employees and employers call the Acas helpline

This release was first published on 20 December 2024 and uses data captured by the helpline data capture system (DCS) and data captured using Acas call centre analytical tools.

Strengths and weaknesses

As these are management information (MI) data, they represent a near-full coverage of all queries within our helpline so there is minimal bias in our sample. The data capture system is used by advisers to capture information about a call during the call. Strong data policies underline how advisers are trained to use the data capture system, however information such as the subject of the call is interpreted by advisers before manually selecting the relevant call topics from an exhaustive list, therefore there may be some small amount of bias within the data due to difference in an individual adviser's interpretation of the call. Our automated call centre analytical tools ensure there is information such as call time and call length for every call the helpline receives.

It is recommended advisers capture data capture system records for every call, however due to the nature of some of the calls handled by advisers, this isn't always possible. Currently around 95% of calls handled by the helpline have associated data capture system records.

These data have been presented in both tabular and graphical form to allow for ease of interpretation and separate data files have been provided to enhance use of the data for further manipulation.

Other weaknesses in the system include the inherent data quality issues that come with management information.

Call topics and subtopics

These are all the helpline call topics and associated subtopics available for advisers to assign to a call using the data capture system. Advisers can select up to 5 call topics and up to 10 call subtopics in a single data capture system record.

Absences, sickness and stress

Subtopics are:

- absence
- mental health
- parental leave
- return to work
- sick pay
- stress
- time off for dependants
- other

Contracts

Subtopics are:

- dismissal and re-engagement
- fixed-term contracts
- flexible working regulations
- gig or platform economy
- hybrid working
- notice period or pay
- part-time working
- probation period
- variation
- written statement
- zero-hour contracts
- other

Diversity and discrimination

Subtopics are:

- age
- disability
- gender pay gap reporting
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- menopause
- neurodiversity
- pregnancy and maternity discrimination
- race
- religion and belief
- sex (including equal pay)
- sexual harassment

- sexual orientation
- other

Discipline, dismissal and grievance

Subtopics are:

- bullying and harassment
- constructive dismissal
- discipline procedure
- dismissal
- grievance procedure
- investigation
- performance management
- suspension
- other

Employment agencies

Subtopics are:

- agency workers regulations
- contracts or terms, including non receipt (Employment Agency Standards)
- employment agency standards (Employment Agency Standards)
- entertainment or model (Employment Agency Standards)
- other

Hot topics

Subtopics are:

- cost of living
- covid-19 (coronavirus)
- EU exit
- tribunal judgement
- other

Holiday and working time

Subtopics are:

- 48-hour week (Health and Safety Executive and Local Authority)
- bank or public holiday
- holiday entitlement
- night working (Health and Safety Executive and Local Authority)
- refusal of entitlement
- rest breaks
- working time regulation
- other

Maternity, paternity and adoptions

Subtopics are:

- adoption
- maternity
- paternity
- pregnancy, and health and safety
- shared parental
- other

Others

Subtopics are:

- debt bondage (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority)
- employment status
- gangmasters licensing (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority)
- ID retained, for example passport (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority)
- physical or mental mistreatment (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority)
- references
- retirement
- settlement agreements
- whistleblowing
- other

Redundancies, lay-offs and business transfers

Subtopics are:

- insolvency
- lay-offs or short-time work
- non-payment of redundancy
- redundancy payment
- redundancy procedure
- statutory guarantee pay
- TUPE
- other

Wages and the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage

Subtopics are:

- agricultural wages
- National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage
- non-payment or deduction of wage
- written pay statements
- other

Relevance

These data are the only source of Acas helpline statistics and so provide the most complete set of published data on this topic outside of the Acas annual report.

They have been designed to cover the main freedom of information requests that are presented to Acas. We're pre-emptively publishing data that is likely to be requested, thus making an efficiency saving for Acas and pre-emptively meeting the requirements of our users. This reduces burden on both the users and producers of the statistics by having one set of data that meets the needs of many users.

Accuracy and reliability

These data are taken from a management information data source. This means they are representative of the full population of helpline users with a very small number of exceptions as detailed below.

How the tables are produced

1. Data is extracted from the Acas helpline data capture system monthly and stored locally due to the data capture system only storing data for 12 months.
2. Data is validated against rules set out in internal data policies.
3. This data is anonymised and analysed using the RStudio analytical software.
4. The analysed data is used to build the statistical report and accompanying data tables in R Markdown.
5. The data is quality assured, with accuracy and consistency checked against existing quality assurance tools.

Timeliness and punctuality

Helpline data is available from the various systems usually within 24 hours of said data being collected. Analysis of this data for the means of this publication occurs on a quarterly basis once the data is available. This statistical bulletin is published quarterly, alongside the [early conciliation and employment tribunal statistical bulletin](#).

Accessibility and clarity

Data have been presented in tabular form in line with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) standards for accessibility where possible for enhanced usability of the data.

Assessment of user needs and perceptions

Data have been presented to fulfil the requirements of most of the freedom of information requests that come into Acas regarding helpline data.

Performance, cost, and respondent burden

Resources taken to collate and publish statistics will be offset by the reduction in ad hoc requests which this publication should largely reduce the need for.

There is very little respondent burden as the majority of the data is automatically obtained from administrative systems. However, this is supplemented with small amounts of data as well as input from other areas.

This bulletin and accompanying tables are produced using a reproducible analytical pipeline, with further quality assurance taking a few days.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

This statistical bulletin uses anonymised data. No protected characteristics are published in our data. Counts are not published, and percentages are rounded to avoid disclosure issues. Where necessary, outputs are suppressed in line with Office for National Statistics guidance on disclosure control to prevent disclosure of information on individuals.

The bulletin provides commentary on the key features of the outputs and identifies any issues or caveats to the data. This accompanying quality report provides further information on the method, production process and quality of the output.

All staff involved in the statistical production process adhere to Civil Service and data protection regulations. The data is stored, accessed, and analysed using Acas's restricted network and IT systems, and access to raw data is password protected and approval for access is granted only to required individuals.