Research Paper

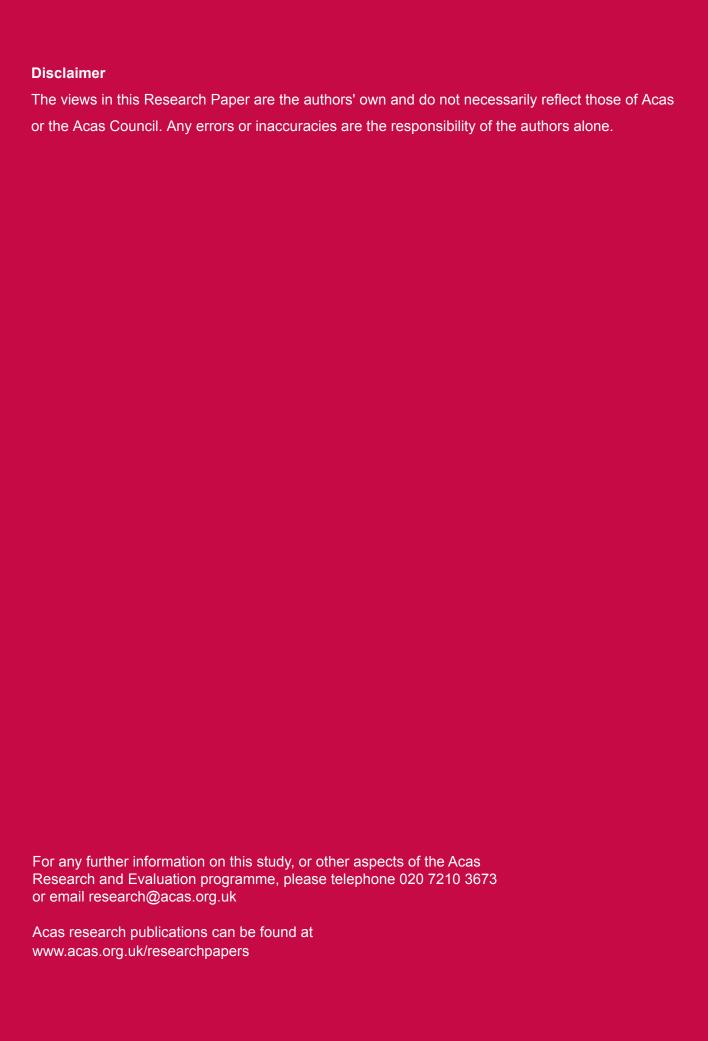## Evaluation of Acas Advisory Projects:
Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects

Ref: 01/17

2017

Daniel Cameron, Michael Clemence and Sara Gariban (Ipsos MORI)

inform   advise   train   work with you

Disclaimer

The views in this Research Paper are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Acas or the Acas Council. Any errors or inaccuracies are the responsibility of the authors alone.

Evaluation of Acas Advisory Projects:

Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects

A report by Ipsos MORI

Daniel Cameron, Michael Clemence and Sara Gariban

March 2017

Table of Contents

Table of Figure

List of Tables

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Acas Advisory Projects, centred on a survey investigating users' experiences – including satisfaction measures – and longer-term impacts of the service. Advisory Projects are delivered by Acas as two distinct strands of work, 'Joint Problem Solving Activities' and 'Workplace Projects'. Both strands were in-scope for this evaluation, which adopts a comparative approach to the analysis.

This research was carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Acas with service users interviewed between 11th May and 12th June 2016. In total, 154 service users were interviewed – comprising 73 recipients of Joint Problem Solving Activities and 81 Workplace Project users.[1] This research was designed to provide robust evidence for the impact of Acas Advisory Projects across a variety of contexts.

Background and context

As in 2012, when the previous evaluation of this service was carried out, the most common main focus for Acas Advisory Projects was 'Conflict/mediation/relationship issues' – 40 per cent of respondents overall selected this as the focus area of their project, in line with 35 per cent in 2012.

There was also consistency with the previous evaluation in terms of the most common stated purpose of the project; 71 per cent of users said that the purpose of their project had been to improve workplace relationships between management and employees (72 per cent said the same in 2012).

Previous positive experiences with Acas was the most common reason that service users sought Acas' assistance or advice; 40 per cent gave this as a key reason. Acas' good reputation was the second most commonly-given reason, at 29 per cent, followed by Acas' independence at 20 per cent.

Joint Problem Solving Activities

Joint Problem Solving Activities are fee-waived projects carried out by Acas Senior Advisers that look to find solutions to workplace problems. This strand of Advisory Project tends to deal with collective dispute situations and may be agreed as part of the settlement to a conciliation case relating to a prior collective employment dispute. They are delivered inside workplaces involving management and employee representatives with the aim of improving employment relations.

In common with all users of Acas Advisory Projects, recipients of Joint Problem Solving Activities were very positive about the service they had received:

- Large proportions felt the adviser was 'very' or 'fairly' good in terms of 'maintaining an impartial stance' (97 per cent), 'understanding the issues facing your workplace' (95 per cent) and 'in encouraging discussions between participants' (93 per cent).

- When asked about the most pleasing aspects of the project, Joint Problem Solving Activity customers most commonly cited 'the way [the adviser] helped with negotiations' and how the service 'helped to move things forward though communication'.

- Three quarters (75 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity recipients felt that the main objective of the project was met, either 'fully' (41 per cent) or to a 'large extent' (34 per cent). Just 4 per cent answered 'not at all'.

---

[1] The sample contained 123 management representatives and 31 trade union/ employee representatives.

- In 80 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activities there was an observed effect on workplace policies or else plans were in place for this. This figure includes anyone who indicated that there had been either a review of, revision to or introduction of policies and procedures or an area of practice. In addition, one third of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users (33 per cent) said there had been the development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee.

- Around eight in ten (78 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activity service users rated the current relationship between managers and employees as either 'very good' (10 per cent) or 'fairly good' (68 per cent). Nearly half of service users (49 per cent) felt that the relationship between management and employees had improved as a result of the project (10 per cent improved 'a lot' and 40 per cent improved 'a little'), whilst just five per cent thought it had got worse.

- In terms of organisational impacts, around one in five cited improvements in terms of the quality of the service / output delivered by their organisation (22 per cent), productivity or efficiency (19 per cent) and meeting objectives or targets (21 per cent).

- Overall, Joint Problem Solving Activities were well received, with 92 per cent of users satisfied overall (68 per cent 'very satisfied' and 23 per cent 'fairly satisfied'). Echoing this, two thirds of users reported that their expectations had been 'met' (67 per cent), whilst 15 per cent felt they had been 'exceeded'.

Workplace Projects

The other strand of Acas Advisory Project is Workplace Projects, which are charged-for (cost recovered) projects carried out by Acas Senior Advisers, that look to find solutions to workplace problems. Unlike Joint Problem Solving Activities, these tend not to be closely associated with collective workplace dispute or collective 'conflict' situations. They are delivered inside workplaces and involve both management and employee representatives. They cover a range of topics related to improving employment relations, such as building trust and developing capability of management/employees/representatives.

In common with all users of Advisory Projects, recipients of Workplace Projects were very positive about the service they had received:

- Large proportions felt the adviser was 'very' or 'fairly' good in terms of 'maintaining an impartial stance' (94 per cent), 'understanding the issues facing your workplace' (94 per cent) and 'in developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project' (91 per cent).

- When asked about the most pleasing aspects of the project, Workplace Project customers most commonly cited '[the adviser being] knowledgeable/understanding' and how the service 'helped to move things forward though communication'.

- Almost nine in ten (88 per cent) Workplace Project recipients felt that the main objective of the project had been met either fully (54 per cent) or to a large extent (33 per cent). Just four per cent answered 'not at all'.

- In 72 per cent of Workplace Projects there was an observed effect on workplace policies or else plans were in place to do so. This figure includes anyone who indicated that there had been either a review of, revision to or introduction of policies and procedures or an area of practice.

- Around nine in ten (89 per cent) Workplace Project service users rated the current relationship between managers and employees as either 'very good'

(26 per cent) or 'fairly good' (63 per cent). Furthermore, 60 per cent of service users felt that the relationship between management and employees had improved as a result of the project (30 per cent improved 'a lot' and 31 per cent improved 'a little'), whilst just five per cent thought it had got worse.

- In terms of organisational impacts, around one in three cited improvements in terms of the quality of the service / output delivered by their organisation (33 per cent), one in four mentioned improvements in productivity or efficiency (25 per cent) and one third said there had been improvements in meeting objectives or targets (32 per cent).

- Overall, Workplace Projects were well received, with 94 per cent of users satisfied overall (80 per cent 'very satisfied' and 14 per cent 'fairly satisfied'). Correspondingly, high proportions of users reported that their expectations had been 'met' (70 per cent) or 'exceeded' (21 per cent).

Comparisons between the different strands of Advisory Project

Whilst both user groups are largely positive about Acas Advisory Projects, there are some indicative differences between users of the two strands of project. Many of these differences can perhaps be accounted for by the differing contexts of the two types of project and in particular the presence of an ongoing or underlying workplace dispute in the case of Joint Problem Solving Activities. For example, just 10 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users described relationships between managers and employees as 'very good', compared to 26 per cent of Workplace Project users.

On the whole, Workplace Project users tend to view the service somewhat more favourably than Joint Problem Solving Activity users. This can be observed in the differences in the proportions who said they were 'very satisfied' with the service overall (80 per cent, compared to 68 per cent) and the proportions who felt that the relationship between management and employees had improved 'a lot' since the project (30 per cent, compared to 10 per cent).

In contrast to the pattern with overall impressions of the service, Joint Problem Solving Activity service users are more likely to report having taking action in terms of workplace policies following the project – again, possibly reflecting their closeness to formal dispute resolution mechanisms. For instance, 47 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported having reviewed or revised policies and procedures, which compares to 35 per cent among Workplace Project users; and 33 per cent reported there had been the development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee, which compares to 15 per cent for Workplace Projects.

Overall results and longer-term trends

Considering both Advisory Project strands, the results of this evaluation are positive and maintain levels of satisfaction reported in the previous wave in 2012. Across all Advisory Projects, overall customer satisfaction stands at 93 per cent, and 82 per cent of service users reported that the main objective of the project had been met either 'fully' or to a 'large extent'. The corresponding figures for these two measures in 2012 were 93 and 76 per cent, respectively.

Additionally, 82 per cent of all users reported an overall improvement in workplace relationships between employees and management, ahead of Acas' target of 70 per cent. This key performance measure is calculated as the proportion of users reporting an improvement in at least one of the following five aspects of employment relations: communication, day-to-day working relationships, trust, employee morale and fairness in treatment of employees.

This overall rate of 82 per cent breaks down to a level of 80 per cent among management representatives and 90 per cent among employee representatives (which compares favourably to figures of 73 per cent and 70 per cent respectively recorded in 2012).

Future service development

High levels of satisfaction on all key measures suggest that Acas continues to deliver a service that meets the needs of its users – a fact borne out by core metrics remaining high between this evaluation and the previous wave in 2012.

A prioritisation exercise, contrasting the importance Advisory Projects users assign to the knowledge of their adviser in different areas, and their reported satisfaction in each of these areas, shows a strongly positive correlation. This suggests that Acas advisers are performing best in those areas that customers consider to be most important – a strongly positive pattern.

Recipients of charged-for Workplace Projects were also strongly positive about the value for money of Acas' assistance. The vast majority (95 per cent) felt that their project represented good value for money and more than half (54 per cent) did not think they could have obtained assistance of a similar quality from another provider at a price they would have been willing to pay.

Half of all Advisory Project users (48 per cent) said they had been directed to make use of Acas online tools – specifically the 'Acas Model Workplace Tool' and the 'Acas Productivity Tool'. Of those who were not told about the tools, most (73 per cent) did not think that it would have been a useful option for their specific case, suggesting that in the main Acas advisers are exercising judgement appropriately and directing to the website only those for whom the tools would be relevant.

1   Introduction

1.1   Study background and objectives

Acas (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) is an independent body funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), which works across England, Scotland and Wales and aims to improve organisational effectiveness and working life through better workplace relations. To achieve this, Acas provides a range of services offering practical advice and expert support aimed at preventing and resolving workplace disputes.

'Joint Problem Solving Activities' and 'Workplace Projects' are collectively known as 'Advisory Projects'. They are carried out by Acas Senior Advisers and look to find solutions to workplace problems. These services have previously been referred to under the umbrella term of 'Workplace Projects'; however to better reflect how this work is delivered, they are now considered as two distinct, though closely related, services.

All Advisory Projects are delivered within workplaces and tend to involve both management and employee representatives. They cover a range of areas related to improving employment relations, such as building trust and developing the capability of management, employees and representatives. The key distinction between the two stands of Advisory Project is that Joint Problem Solving Activities tend to deal with ongoing or emerging workplace disputes and may be agreed as part of the settlement to a conciliation case relating to a prior collective employment dispute. As they form part of an existing arrangement with Acas, Joint Problem Solving Activities tend to be provided on a 'fee-waived' basis whereas organisations are charged for the costs incurred during an Acas Workplace Project.

In the 2015/16 operational year, Acas carried out 268 Advisory Projects, 142 of which were (fee-waived) Joint Problem Solving Activities and 126 were (charged) Workplace Projects.

Both Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects are tailored to the specific needs of each organisation and so can vary considerably in scope and size, ranging from single-site one-day workshops to more involved programmes including multiple workplaces, and delivered over a number of months. In almost all cases however, the project will involve management and employee representatives working jointly to improve relationships and organisational effectiveness or to manage change. Where trade unions are recognised, union representatives will normally take part.

The topics covered can also range widely, but typical subjects include:

- Collective bargaining arrangements;
- Communication, consultation and employee involvement;
- Improving working relationships;
- Implementation of new pay or grading arrangements;
- Improvements to organisational performance; and
- Managing aspects of organisational change.

Throughout an Advisory Project, the Acas Senior Adviser will work jointly with managers and employee representatives to provide training and advice on identifying and dealing with workplace issues. The aspects covered might include:

- Diagnosing workplace problems;
- Learning new behaviours and methods of working together jointly;
- Reviewing and revising existing workplace policies, practices, or structures;

- Developing and/or implementing new workplace policies, practices, or structures; and

- Implementing new or revised workplace policies, practices or structures.

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Acas' Advisory Projects services (reviewing both Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects), conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Acas between January and July 2016. The evaluation comprised a telephone survey of 154 recent service users, including both management and employee representatives. The survey instrument was based on that used during the previous Acas Workplace Projects evaluation, but with some amendments to simplify questions where possible and to add content to reflect Acas' current priorities, particularly with regards to online tools and key adviser attributes.

The specific objectives for this evaluation were to:

- Provide reliable data on whether the service is meeting the needs and expectations of customers;

- Measure the various impacts of the service on organisations;

- Identify potential improvements to the service to help inform Acas' strategy for extending its reach and impact;

- Compare results from this wave with those recorded in the previous evaluation to understand if perceptions of the service have shifted; and,

- Explore how user views of service delivery, customer satisfaction and overall impacts of the service differ between the two strands of project, Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects.

Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects have previously been evaluated by Acas, most recently in 2012, however previous evaluations have made less distinction in the analysis and reporting between the two strands of Advisory Projects.[2]

1.2 Methodology

The methodology used for this evaluation was the same as that used in previous Workplace Project evaluations; a census survey of all management and employee representative contacts involved in recent Workplace Projects was carried out using a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) approach.

The survey sample frame comprised all Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects logged in Acas' management information (MI) data as closed between December 2014 and January 2016. After sample cleaning, where duplicates and cases without sufficient contact information were removed, this resulted in a sample frame consisting of 185 contacts who were involved in a Joint Problem Solving Activity and 150 involved in a Workplace Project.

To increase the size of the sample, in cases where the contact details of only one side of a given project were recorded in the MI, this participant was asked to supply contact details of the other side. During fieldwork this approach produced a further 45 sample leads, and four completed interviews (all trade union contacts; two from the Joint Problem Solving Activities strand and two from Workplace Projects). Adjusted response rate calculations do not include these additional contacts.

---

[2] As stated earlier, previous evaluations considered both strands of project collectively as "Workplace Projects".

In total, 154 interviews were conducted, 73 participants involved in a Joint Problem Solving Activity and 81 involved in a Workplace Project, with interviews taking place between 11 May and 12 June 2016. Across both strands, 31 participants were employee representatives (e.g. trade union officers) and 123 were management representatives.

The adjusted response rate for the survey (once 39 unusable leads were removed) stands at 52 per cent overall; 45 per cent among Joint Problem Solving Activity users and 60 per cent among Workplace Project users. The unadjusted response rate, including sample 'deadwood' and other unusable leads from the final sample, was 46 per cent (39 per cent for Joint Problem Solving Activities and 54 per cent for Workplace Projects). Looking by respondent type, the unadjusted response rate was 42 per cent for employers and 45 per cent for employees.

Table 1 – Survey response rates by service user type

Project type	Interviews	Contacts	Unadjusted Response Rate (%)
Joint Problem Solving Activities	73	185	39
Workplace Project	81	150	54
Total	**154**	**335**	**46**

As the survey is a census and most analysis considers the two sub-groups separately, data has not been weighted.

1.3   Presentation and interpretation of data

The principal approach to reporting data in this document is to analyse the results by the two main groups – Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Project users – separately. Owing to small base sizes, no claims can be made regarding statistical significance of the data, and further sub-group analysis is avoided. Where there is sub-group analysis, the results are typically presented as numbers rather than percentages.

Percentage scores for "net" categories (e.g. an overall good percentage based from "very" and "fairly" good scores) are calculated based on the overall number of responses in the included codes and then rounding, rather than by the addition of the percentage scores for each included category. As a result, the percentage for some net categories will differ by one percentage point from the apparent total of its constituent categories.

The research carried out for this project has been in compliance with the Market Research Society (MRS) / ESOMAR Code, the Data Protection Act, and ISO 20252.

1.4   Terminology

Throughout this report the following terminology will be used to describe Acas Advisory Projects:

Joint Problem Solving Activities – These are fee-waived projects carried out by Acas Senior Advisers that look to find solutions to workplace problems. These interventions are directly linked to disputes and are often agreed as part of the settlement to a prior collective conciliation case. These are delivered inside workplaces involving management and employee representatives with the aim of improving employment relations.

Workplace Projects – These are charged-for (cost recovered) projects carried out by Acas Senior Advisers that look to find solutions to workplace problems. These are delivered inside workplaces and involve both management and employee representatives. They cover a range of topics related to improving employment relations, such as building trust and developing capability of management / employees / representatives.

Advisory Projects – This is the generic term used when referring to Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects together.

1.5 Outline of the report

- **Chapter two** provides a background to Acas Advisory Projects (covering both types of project) including the format and topics covered, routes to the service and reasons for using Acas.

- **Chapter three** reports on user experiences and the outcomes of Joint Problem Solving Activities specifically.

- **Chapter four** focuses on the user experiences and the outcomes of Workplace Projects specifically.

- **Chapter five** draws out the key comparisons across the service strands in summary form and considers the results which are relevant to the future developments of the Advisory Projects service as a whole.

2   Background to Acas Advisory Projects

This chapter considers the background to Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects, including the main area or focus of the Advisory Projects, how they were delivered and the way customers accessed these services.

2.1   Scope and nature of Advisory Projects

The most common main focus of the project across both Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects was 'conflict, mediation, or relationship issues' (38 per cent and 41 per cent of service users respectively). The second most prevalent area of focus for Joint Problem Solving Activities was the category of 'trade union recognition' which accounted for around one in five (19 per cent) projects, whereas 'information and consultation' and 'payment and grading arrangements' were slightly more prevalent for Workplace Projects (12 per cent and 11 per cent respectively).

Conflict/mediation/relationship issues were also the most common area of focus in the previous wave of the Advisory Projects evaluation in 2012: then 35 per cent of service users said that this was the chief area of focus, compared to 40 per cent of all users in this wave.

Table 2 – Main area of focus for the project

What would you say was the main focus or area of the project?	Joint problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %
Conflict/mediation/relationship issues	38	41
Information and consultation	8	12
Trade Union Recognition	19	-
Payment and grading arrangements	3	11
Negotiation and collective bargaining	8	5
Bullying and harassment	3	6
Recruiting, contracting and employing people	4	2
Performance management	3	4
Equality and diversity	1	4
Equal pay	1	2
Change management	1	2
Attendance/absence management	1	1
Employment law	3	-
Flexible working, hours and holidays	3	-
Stress management	-	2
Supervision/line management	-	2
Discrimination	1	-
Discipline and grievance	-	1
Working arrangements	1	-
Other	-	2
Base	*73*	*81*

Base: All Advisory Project users

Participants were asked to choose the descriptions that best explained the purpose of their project and were able to select more than one option.

Most Joint Problem Solving Activity users regarded the purpose of the project to be "improving workplace relationships between management and trade unions by helping them to work together better" (66 per cent) closely followed by "improving workplace relationships between management and employees by helping them to work together better" (64 per cent).

Workplace Projects users were more likely to describe the purpose of their project as "improving workplace relationships between management and employees by helping them to work together better" (77 per cent). They were also markedly more likely than Joint Problem Solving Activities users to select "improving workplace relationships between employees in the workplace by helping employees work together better" (73 per cent compared to 40 per cent among Joint Problem Solving Activity users).

Figure 1 – Acas project purpose

Which, if any, of the following could be used to describe the Acas project?

	Joint Problem Solving Activities	Workplace Projects
Improving workplace relationships between management and trade unions by helping them to work better together	66%	31%
Improving workplace relationships between management and employees by helping them to work better together	64%	77%
Improving workforce relationships (between employees) in the workplace by helping employees work together better	40%	73%
Organisational change by making changes to key businesses processes or practices	36%	33%
A project to help update HR policies and procedures	34%	25%
Problem solving on a specific issue such as poor absence or conducting job evaluations	26%	32%
The Acas advisor wrote new or amended policies and procedures for the workplace	18%	12%
Don't know	1%	

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

Looking across both types of Advisory Project, results here are very similar to the previous wave in 2012; the most common purpose in both evaluations was "improving workplace relationships between management and employees by helping them to work better together". Seventy-two per cent gave this as a reason for the project in the 2012 wave, compared to 71 per cent in this evaluation. Similarly, improving workplace relationships between employees remained the second-most common purpose, at 65 per cent in 2012 and 57 per cent in this evaluation.

Across both types of Advisory Project, the most common delivery format was facilitated joint-working. This was more commonly cited by Joint Problem Solving Activity users than Workplace Project users (59 per cent compared to 40 per cent), which likely reflects the background of collective disputes in many of these projects. Conversely, training for staff and running staff surveys were more common among Workplace Projects users (25 per cent compared to 12 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users, and 11 per cent compared to 4 per cent respectively).

Table 3 – Training format by service user type

And in which formats was the project delivered?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace project service users %
Facilitated joint-working	59	40
Diagnostic workshops	30	27
Group mediations	29	27
Training for staff	12	25
Focus groups	10	15
Staff surveys	4	11
Any other type of follow-up work	4	5
Don't know	1	2
Base	*73*	*81*

Base: All Advisory Project users

Management representatives (123 participants) were asked whether or not they received an initial letter laying out the terms of reference of the work at the outset of the project. This practice was more common among recipients of Workplace Projects (80 per cent) than it was for Joint Problem Solving Activities users (59 per cent).

2.2   Reasons for choosing Acas

Across both Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects, the most common reason participants gave for using Acas was because of a good experience in the past (37 per cent and 34 per cent respectively), followed by Acas having a good reputation (26 per cent and 32 per cent) and Acas providing independent, unbiased advice (19 per cent and 21 per cent). Among the less-common options there were further differences between the two key user groups (reflecting the fact that Joint Problem Solving Activity tend to be linked to collective disputes):

- Workplace Project users were more likely to cite Acas having relevant expertise to deal with a particular issue or problem (21 per cent compared to 11 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users).

- Joint Problem Solving Activity users were more likely to say that Acas was acceptable to trade unions or employee representatives (12 per cent versus two per cent of Workplace Project users).

- Joint Problem Solving Activity users were also more likely to say that they had reached a point where the issue could not be resolved between themselves (12 per cent versus five per cent of Workplace Project users).

Table 4 – Reasons for choosing Acas

Why did you and others at the organisation decide to use Acas?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %	All Advisory Projects %
Good experience in the past	37	43	40
Acas has a good reputation	26	32	29
Acas advice is independent/unbiased	19	21	20
We had reached a point where the issue could not be resolved between ourselves	12	5	8
Acas is acceptable to trade union/employee representatives	12	2	7
Acas has relevant expertise in dealing with the particular issues/problem	11	21	16
To resolve the issue/matter more quickly that we could ourselves	7	2	5
It's part of our formal procedures to involve a third party	5	4	5
Recommendation of a colleague	3	4	3
To learn from others' experience	-	2	1
To demonstrate we were taking the issue/matter seriously	1	1	1
The other side wanted a third party involved	1	-	1
Not involved in the decision	1	-	1
Other	5	2	4
Don't know	5	1	3
Base	*73*	*81*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project users

The key reasons given for choosing Acas remain the same as those given in the 2012 Advisory Projects evaluation, although the order of priority has shifted somewhat. The most common reason in 2012 for seeking Acas' help was its good reputation (32 per cent), followed by good past experience (29 per cent) and then Acas having relevant expertise in the area (23 per cent). The figures are however not directly comparable due to changes made to the question wording for the current evaluation wave.

2.3   Routes to Acas

Most Joint Problem Solving Activity projects were the result of a direct approach from someone in their organisation to Acas (78 per cent), although some came from other work Acas had being doing with their organisation on a related issue (14 per cent). This differs from Workplace Project users, nearly all of whom approached Acas for assistance (98 per cent). This is likely due to the fact that Joint Problem Solving Activities, unlike Workplace Projects, are sometimes agreed as part of the settlement to a prior Acas conciliation case.

Table 5 - Routes to Acas

How did this project come about?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %
Someone at (organisation) approached Acas for assistance	78	98
From other work Acas had been doing with (organisation) on a related issue	14	1
Acas approached (organisation) to offer assistance	5	1
Other	3	-
Base	*73*	*81*

Base: All Advisory Project users

Management representatives were also asked who in their organisation was involved in the decision to seek Acas' involvement in their workplace. For both strands of project, the most common key decision-makers were those involved in Human Resources (HR). This was particularly the case for Workplace Projects, where in half of cases (23 users) the decision-maker was an HR Manager or Director, compared to 12 Joint Problem Solving Activity service users.

Table 6 – Key decision-makers

Job title of person who decided to seek Acas' involvement *Reported as n, not %*	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users n	Workplace Project service users n
HR Manager	12	23
HR Director	7	14
Other General Administration	7	11
Other General Manager	9	6
Managing Director/Chief Executive	6	6
Department Director	4	4
Relations Manager	3	3
HR Administrator	-	5
Other	4	3
Don't know	1	1
Base	*53*	*76*

Base: All employer-side Advisory Project users

3 Joint Problem Solving Activities: User views, impacts and overall satisfaction

This chapter examines the views of recent users of Acas' Joint Problem Solving Activities (historically referred to as "fee-waived Workplace Projects"). User satisfaction and the impacts of charged-for Workplace Projects is reported separately in chapter four, however this chapter will include some comparisons between the two strands of project for key questions.

3.1 Views of the Acas adviser

Participants were asked to rate the skills of their Acas adviser across five key dimensions: understanding the issues facing the workplace, developing a good relationship with project participants, maintaining an impartial stance, skill in encouraging discussion between participants, and following through on what they had promised to do.

On all five measures Acas advisers scored highly, with at least nine in ten service users rating the adviser as either 'fairly good' or 'very good' on each measure.

Joint Problem Solving Activity service users were noticeably more likely to view the adviser's skill in encouraging discussions between participants positively, with 93 per cent viewing this as 'fairly good' or 'very good', compared to 83 per cent among Workplace Project service users.

Table 7 – Rating the Acas adviser I

How would you rate the Acas adviser in terms of the following?	Very/ fairly good %	Neither good nor poor %	Very/ fairly poor %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Maintaining an impartial stance	97	1	-	1	73
Understanding the issues facing your workplace	95	3	1	1	73
Skill in encouraging discussions between participants	93	-	1	5	73
Developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project	92	3	1	4	73
Following through on anything they promised to do	88	-	3	10	73

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity users

Acas advisers were also rated on a number of knowledge and experience-based metrics. Across all ten measures, the views of Joint Problem Solving Activity service

users were broadly in line with those of Workplace Project users (detailed separately in chapter four) – both rated the adviser as experienced in the types of issues addressed and knowledge of the specific subject area most highly. On those measures where the proportion reporting the service as good is lower, this tends to be due to a large proportion saying that the measure is not relevant – for instance, where 44 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users rated "Improving workplace policies, practices or structures" as good, 56 per cent (the remaining sample) said this was not relevant to their case, rather than saying it was poor, reflecting the fact that individual projects, being tailored to the specific needs of organisations, vary considerably in scope.

Table 8 – Rating the Acas adviser II

How would you rate the Acas adviser in terms of the following?	Very/ fairly good %	Neither good nor poor %	Very/ fairly poor %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Relevant knowledge of your industry/sector	84	1	3	12	73
Relevant knowledge of your local area/region	62	4	1	33	73
Knowledge of the specific subject area	93	-	3	4	73
Being experienced in the types of issues addressed	95	-	1	4	73
Providing enough information in advance	81	-	1	18	73
Helping you to understand the management's point of view (asked of employee-side respondents only)	6 (n not %)	-	-	1 (n not %)	7
Helping you to understand the employees' point of view (asked of employer-side respondents only)	77	1	-	22	74
Diagnosing workplace problems	56	1	1	41	73
Improving workplace policies, practices or structures	40	4	-	56	73
Implementing new workplace policies, practices or structures	27	3	1	68	73

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity users

3.2   Experience of the Advisory Project

To understand whether there were any particular high or low points in the service they received, participants were asked whether they encountered something that pleased them during the project on the one hand, or if they had cause to complain on the other.

The largest proportion (42 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users said that they experienced neither something that pleased them specifically, nor a cause for complaint. However, 33 per cent said they experienced "a few small things that pleased them", 14 per cent experienced "something particularly good that pleased them", and 10 per cent identified "a few minor problems or issues".

Participants who experienced something positive – either something particularly good or a few small things that pleased them – were asked an open-ended question to understand what it was that they found useful. The most common response was 'Acas helped with negotiations.' This was more frequently cited by Joint Problem Solving Activity users (12 mentions) than it was for Workplace Project service users (two mentions). This difference is possibly explained by the nature of Joint Problem Solving Activities, which are commonly linked to collective disputes, where there is likely to be some form of negotiation taking place. Other factors cited as useful include how Acas helped to move things forward (10 users) and Acas being solution-focused (nine users).

Table 9 – Positive experiences of Joint Problem Solving Activities

Thinking about what pleased you, could you tell us what happened?	Number of mentions n
The way they helped with negotiations	12
Helped to move things forward/moved things forward through communication	10
They were solution-focused/provided relevant solutions	9
Problem was resolved/successful outcome	6
They were even-handed/impartial/fair/non-biased	5
Other	5
They were professional/ efficient/organised/reliable	4
They gave good/practical advice/guidance/information	4
They were approachable/personable/friendly	3
Provided a follow-up visit	2
They were knowledgeable/understanding	1
Training quality/relevance/delivery	1
Quality feedback	1
Base	*34*

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity users (Note: Respondents were able to select more than one response)

Participants who said they had problems or issues were also asked for more details, although this was the case for just seven Joint Problem Solving Activity users. In

all cases the reasons given for the negative experience were related to internal issues or the outcome, rather than the Acas adviser or Acas service itself. For instance, three participants felt they had a negative experience owing to an inability to reach a satisfactory conclusion, and a further two attributed it to employee or staff-related issues.

3.3   Achieving objectives

Service users were asked the extent to which they felt that the main objective of the Advisory Project was achieved. Three quarters (75 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity users felt the main objective was either fully (41 per cent) or to a large extent (34 per cent) achieved. This is slightly lower than among Workplace Project service users (where 88 per cent felt that their objective was fully or to a large extent achieved).

One in five (21 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activity users reported that the main objective of their project was met 'to some extent' (compared to seven per cent of Workplace Projects users) and four per cent answered that the objective was "not at all" achieved.

Table 10 – Project achievement against main objective

To what extent do you feel the main objective of the Acas project was achieved?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %	All project service users %
Fully	**41**	54	48
To a large extent	**34**	33	34
To some extent	**21**	7	14
Not at all	**4**	4	4
Don't know	**-**	1	1
Base	*73*	*81*	154

Base: All Advisory Project users

In the 2012 wave of the evaluation, 76 per cent of all Advisory Project users reported that the main objective of their project was met fully or to a large extent. This figure is similar to the aggregate figure of 82 per cent in this evaluation, when considering both strands of project together. Dissatisfaction with achievement of objectives is also similar – in both waves of the evaluation four per cent said that their objectives were "not at all" met.

The 18 Joint Problem Solving Activity participants who said that their main project objective had been partly achieved or had not been achieved at all were asked why this was the case. The most common reasons given were that it was too early to say (four participants), a lack of commitment from the other side (a further four), as well as a lack of cooperation between management and employee representatives (three participants). A small number of other reasons were given in individual cases – but in just one instance did a participant suggest that the project did not achieve its main objective because Acas had not "got to the heart of the issue".

3.4   Actions arising

The most common action arising from Joint Problem Solving Activities was the review or revision of *an area of practice*, which was reported by 57 per cent of service users. Just under half (47 per cent) reviewed or revised *policies and procedures*.

While the picture was broadly similar between users of the two types of Advisory Project, there were two notable differences:

- Review or revision of policies or procedures was reported by nearly half (47 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity users, compared to around a third (35 per cent) of Workplace Project service users.

- The development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee arose from one in three (33 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activities, compared to one in seven (15 per cent) Workplace Projects, reflecting the greater collective nature of Joint Problem Solving Activities.

Overall, 75 per cent of all Advisory Projects led to changes in workplace policies[3]. For Joint Problem Solving Activity users alone, this figure stood at 80 per cent.

Table 11 – Actions arising from the project

Which of the following actions… have been taken as a result of the Acas project?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %	All Advisory Project users %
Review or revision of an area of practice	**56**	58	57
Review or revision of policies and procedures	**47**	35	40
Plans in place to review or revise policies/procedures	**38**	30	34
Introduction of policies and procedures	**37**	36	36
Plans in place to introduce policies and procedures	**33**	30	31
NET FIGURE – enacted or planned changes to workplace policies	***80***	*72*	*75*
Development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee	**33**	15	23
Base	*73*	*81*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project users

---

[3] Measured as the introduction of new policies and procedures, review or revision of an area of practice or policies and procedures, or plans in place to review existing policies or procedures, or to introduce new ones (Q26b-f).

Comparing figures for all Advisory Projects against the 2012 data, the pattern of actions arising remains similar. The most common action taken as a result of an Acas project is the review or revision of an area of practice (54 per cent in this evaluation and 57 per cent in 2012), followed by the review or revision of policies and procedures. The only area where there has been a change greater than five percentage points is in plans being put in place to revise policies or procedures, where the proportion fell from 43 per cent in 2012 to 34 per cent in this evaluation. The net figure for any enacted or planned changes to workplace policies in all Advisory Projects of 75 per cent compares to a net figure of 68 per cent in the 2012 evaluation.

Figure 2 — Trend analysis — actions arising from the project

Actions arising from Acas projects – trend
Which of the following actions… have been taken as a result of the Acas project?

Action	2016	2012
Review or revision of an area of practice	57%	54%
Review or revision of policies and procedures	40%	45%
Introduction of policies and procedures	36%	35%
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures	34%	43%
Plans in place to introduce policies and procedures	31%	36%
Development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee	23%	18%

Base 2016: 342 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016
Base 2012: 158 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 19 March – 18 May 2012

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

3.5   Sustaining activities

Six in ten Joint Problem Solving Activity participants (60 per cent) felt that any actions arising from the project were sustained fully, or to a large extent. This is a slightly smaller proportion than among Workplace Project service users, 70 per cent of whom said they were able to sustain activities fully or to a large extent.

23

Table 12 - Sustaining activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project

To what extent have you... been able to sustain any activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project, in the period since Acas' involvement?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %	All Advisory Project users
Fully	**29**	33	31
To a large extent	**32**	37	34
To some extent	**27**	20	23
Not at all	**7**	4	5
Don't know	**4**	6	5
Base	*73*	*81*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project users

3.6   Relationships between managers and employees

Around eight in ten (78 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activity service users rated the current relationship between managers and employees as either "very good" (10 per cent) or "fairly good" (68 per cent); however this figure is lower than was the case for Workplace Project users, of whom 89 per cent rated the relationship positively (26 per cent "very good" and 63 per cent "fairly good"). As with earlier findings, this difference is likely to reflect the differing nature of the services and the background of a collective dispute which may be present in Joint Problem Solving Activities.

Looking at the views of employer and employee representatives across *all* Advisory Projects, employee representatives tended to be less positive than employers about the current relationship between managers and employees, with 55 per cent of this small group (31 participants) rating workplace relations as very or fairly good, compared to 91 per cent among employer respondents. This lower proportion is primarily due to a larger proportion (29 per cent) rating management-staff relations as "neither good nor poor" – although six per cent rated their workplace relations as "fairly poor", and six per cent rated them as "very poor". By contrast, no management representatives felt that workplace relations were "very poor".

Participants were also asked if the relationship between management and employees had improved, stayed the same or worsened since their Advisory Project had taken place. Nearly half (49 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity participants felt that the relationship between management and employees had improved as a result of the Acas project; however this too was a lower proportion than for Workplace Project users (where 60 per cent reported an improvement).

The difference between the two strands of project is most marked at the most positive point of the answer scale, as 10 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity participants reported that the employer-employee relationship in their workplace had improved 'a lot', compared to 30 per cent among Workplace Project participants.

The lower proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity users who felt relationships had improved does not mean that outcomes were markedly worse amongst this group, as the proportion of both groups who felt that relationships had become

worse was small (both five per cent). Instead, a larger proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity participants felt that relationships had stayed the same: 38 per cent, compared to 31 per cent of Workplace Project users.

Looking across all Advisory Projects again, employee representatives were more likely than employers to say the employment relations had improved (65 per cent versus 53 per cent), which may reflect a generally less positive outlook among this group (as already detailed above).

Figure 3 – State of employment relations since the project

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

Among Joint Problem Solving Activity users who thought that workplace relationships had improved as a result of the project, 32 of 36 said this was at least to some extent attributable to Acas, with eight saying that the improvement was fully attributable to the Acas project. Only two service users said that improvements in workplace relationships were "not at all" attributable to the Acas project.

Table 13 – Importance of the Acas project to improvements in workplace relations

To what extent if any can this improvement be attributed to the Acas project?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users n
Fully	8
To a large extent	10
To some extent	14
Not at all	2
Don't know	2
Base	*36*

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity users who reported an improvement in workplace relations

Participants were then asked whether or not the Acas Advisory Project had an impact on specific types of workplace relations, including communication, trust between employees and management and employee morale. Across each of the measures asked, more than four in ten Joint Problem Solving Activity users reported an improvement with the most positive responses in respect of communication and day-to-day working relationships between management and employees (63 per cent and 51 per cent respectively said that these aspects had improved). It is also noteworthy that relatively large minorities answered "not relevant" across each of these aspects, reflecting the varied nature of Advisory Projects.

Across most aspects, Joint Problem Solving Activity service users tended to be less positive about the impacts of the project than Workplace Project participants. Most notably, 40 per cent of this group felt that the project had made employee morale better compared to 58 per cent of Workplace Project service users. Further, whilst both user groups were most positive about the impact of the Acas project on communication in the workplace - with 63 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users and 72 per cent of Workplace Project users saying that the project made this better – within these proportions, Joint Problem Solving Activity service users were less strongly positive, with 19 per cent of this group saying the project had made communications much better, compared to 37 per cent of Workplace Project users.

Table 14 – Effects of the project on workplace relations

And do you feel the following are now better, the same, or worse as a result of the Acas project?	Much/ A little better %	Same %	Much/ A little worse %	Too early to say %	Don't know/ Not relevant %	Base
Day-to-day working relationships between management and employees	51	14	1	10	25	73
Working relationships between employees	41	21	-	5	33	73
Fairness in treatment of employees	48	18	-	8	26	73
Employee morale	40	19	4	5	32	73
Trust between management and employees	42	21	1	4	30	73
Communication	63	14	-	3	21	73

Base: All Joint Problem Solving Activity users

3.7 Overall improvement in employee and management relations

The level of overall improvement in workplace relationships between employees and management forms a key component of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Acas and its sponsor, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Under this agreement there is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) that an improvement in workplace relationships is registered in 70 per cent of all Advisory Projects.

The improvement figure for this KPI is calculated as the proportion of service users reporting that they had seen improvements in workplace relations in at least one of the areas below[4]:

- Communication;
- Day to day working relationships;
- Trust;
- Employee morale; and
- Fairness in treatment of employees.

---

[4] This data is gathered in the Q28 battery of the survey; through sub-questions f, a, e, d, and c respectively

Considering just Joint Problem Solving Activities, the proportion of service users reporting an improvement in at least one of these aspects stands at 77 per cent.

Considering all Advisory Projects (that is both Joint Problem Solving Activities and also Workplace Projects, which are explored more fully in chapter four) – which is the basis of the KPI - the level of overall improvement recorded across all users stands at 82 per cent, twelve percentage points above the current target.

This breaks down to a level of 80 per cent amongst management representatives, and 90 per cent amongst employee representatives. This compares to figures of 73 per cent and 70 per cent respectively recorded in 2012 – although care should be taken when making comparisons for the employee sample as this sample has a very small base size in this evaluation (31 participants).

3.8   Quality of service and output

Service users had strongly positive views of the impact of the Acas project on their organisation's quality of service and output across three key areas: the quality of service or output delivered; productivity or efficiency, and; meeting objectives or targets.

No participants felt that the Acas project had made things worse in respect of any of these areas – however, large proportions did say that each area was 'not relevant' to their organisation; in the case of Joint Problem Solving Activities 53 per cent said this about the quality of service/output delivered, 62 per cent for productivity or efficiency, and 55 per cent for meeting objectives/targets. This reflects the broad range of work undertaking by the Acas Advisory Projects service.

Table 15 – Impacts on quality of service and output

Do you think the following are… as a result of the Acas project?	Better %	Same %	Worse %	Too early to say %	Not relevant / Don't know %	Base
Quality of the service/output delivered by your organisation	22	22	-	3	53	73
Productivity or efficiency	19	19	-	-	62	73
Meeting objectives or targets	21	19	-	5	55	73

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity service users

Compared to Workplace Project users, a smaller proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity users said that they felt that project had a positive impact on the quality of service delivered (22 per cent compared to 27 per cent) and meeting objectives or targets (21 per cent compared to 26 per cent).

3.9   Measurable impacts

Survey participants were also asked about the impact of the Advisory Project on three specific areas which can have a measurable impact on organisational performance – staff turnover, levels of absence and the number of employee grievances. Very few Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported a change in any of these respects:

Staff turnover: One Joint Problem Solving Activity service user reported an impact on staff turnover, and their view was that it had "decreased to a large extent".

Levels of absence: Similarly, three Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported an impact on levels of absence, and for all three the view was that it had "decreased to some extent".

Number of employee grievances: Ten users reported that the project had an impact on the number of employee grievances. All said that employee grievances had decreased – seven said it had decreased to some extent, and the remaining three said it had reduced to a large extent.

3.10   Further impacts

Survey respondents were asked whether they felt that the Acas project had any further impacts on their workplace – and if so, what these were.

Just over half (55 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users felt their project had further impacts, with the most common answer being that it gave a "better understanding of what had caused the dispute and ways to avoid it in the future" (10 of the 27 participants who indicated there had been further impacts), followed by "improved working relationships between employees and managers" (five of 27).

Table 16 – Further impacts of the project (open response)

Briefly, what were the further impacts? *(Reported as n, not %)*	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users *n*
Gave a better understanding of what had caused the dispute, and ways to avoid it in the future	10
Improved working relationships between employees/management	5
Gave a better understanding of job roles/responsibilities	3
Improved communication	3
Improved awareness of equality and diversity	3
Improved levels of trust between employees and management	2
Improved working conditions	3
Too early to say/work in progress	1
Other	3
Base	*27*

Base: Joint Problem Solving Activity users who said the project had further impacts

3.11 Meeting expectations

Two thirds (67 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported that their expectations for the project had been "met", whilst 15 per cent went further to say they had been "exceeded".

Whilst the pattern of responses across both types of Advisory Project is similar, Joint Problem Solving Activity participants were less inclined than Workplace Project users to say that the project "exceeded" their expectations (15 per cent compared to 21 per cent) and were more likely to say that their expectations were "not met" (eight per cent compared to one per cent).

Figure 4 – Comparing Advisory Project experience with expectations

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

3.12 Satisfaction with the project

Overall, just over nine in ten (92 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activity service users were satisfied with their project, with 68 per cent reporting that they were "very satisfied" and 23 per cent saying they were "fairly satisfied". This compares to 94 per cent of Workplace Project service users who said they were satisfied with their project.

Although overall levels of satisfaction are similar, Joint Project Solving Activity service users were less likely than Workplace Project users to say they were "very" satisfied (68 per cent, compared to 80 per cent).

Figure 5 – Overall project satisfaction

Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Acas project?

Joint Problem Solving Activities: Very satisfied 68%, Fairly satisfied 23%, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4%, Fairly dissatisfied 3%, Very dissatisfied 1%

Workplace Projects: Very satisfied 80%, Fairly satisfied 14%, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4%, Fairly dissatisfied 1%, Very dissatisfied 1%

■ Very satisfied ■ Fairly satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Fairly dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Acas and Ipsos MORI

The overall satisfaction figure aggregated across both strands of Advisory Projects is 93 per cent, which breaks down as 75 per cent "very" satisfied and 18 per cent "fairly" satisfied.

Overall satisfaction was similarly high in the 2012 evaluation of Advisory Projects, when the overall level of satisfaction also stood at 93 percent, but with a more even break down of 63 per cent "very" satisfied and 30 per cent "fairly" satisfied (i.e. less concentrated at the top end than is the case in this evaluation).

3.13 Recommending Acas

Echoing these high levels of overall satisfaction, a large majority of participants said that they would recommend Acas in the future – with 95 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity participants saying they would recommend Acas to a colleague or professional contact in a similar situation.

Likelihood to recommend was similarly high among Workplace Project users, 98 per cent of whom would recommend Acas to a colleague. Unlike overall satisfaction, there was less disparity between the two strands of project at the most positive point of the scale, with broadly similar proportions saying they would be "very" likely to recommend Acas (79 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users, compared to 84 per cent of Workplace Project users).

Table 17 - Recommending Acas projects to a colleague or professional contact

If a relevant situation arose how likely or unlikely would you be to recommend Acas projects to a colleague or other professional contact?	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	Workplace Project service users %	All Advisory Project users %
Very likely	**79**	84	82
Fairly likely	**15**	14	14
Neither likely nor unlikely	**-**	1	1
Fairly unlikely	**3**	-	1
Very unlikely	**3**	1	2
Base	*73*	*81*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project users

4 Workplace Projects: User views, impacts and overall satisfaction

This chapter examines the views of recent users of Acas Workplace Projects (historically also referred to as "charged workplace projects"). As in the chapter three, this chapter will include some comparisons between the two strands of Advisory Project for key questions.

4.1 Views of the Acas adviser

Participants were asked to rate the skills of their Acas adviser across five key dimensions; understanding the issues facing the workplace, developing a good relationship with project participants, maintaining an impartial stance, skill in encouraging discussion between participants, and following through on what they had promised to do.

On all five measures Acas advisers were scored highly, with more than eight in ten service users rating the adviser as either 'fairly good' or 'very good' and no users rating the adviser negatively. Overall, results were similar to Joint Problem Solving Activity service users.

Workplace Project service users were however slightly less likely to view the adviser's skill in encouraging discussions between participants positively, with 83 per cent viewing this as 'fairly good' or 'very good', compared to 93 per cent among Joint Problem Solving Activity service users. It should be noted that this difference is due to a greater proportion of Workplace Projects users answering "Don't know" to the question, rather than a higher level of dissatisfaction.

Table 18 – Rating the Acas adviser I

How would you rate the Acas adviser in terms of the following?	Very/ fairly good %	Neither good nor poor %	Very/ fairly poor %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Maintaining an impartial stance	94	-	-	6	*81*
Understanding the issues facing your workplace	94	-	-	6	*81*
Skill in encouraging discussions between participants	83	-	-	17	*81*
Developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project	91	-	-	9	*81*
Following through on anything they promised to do	89	-	-	11	*81*

Base: Workplace Projects service users

Acas advisers were also rated on a number of knowledge and experience-based metrics. Across all ten measures, the views of Workplace Project service users were broadly in line with those of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users – both rated being experienced in the types of issues addressed and knowledge of the specific subject area most highly. On those measures where the proportion reporting the service as good is lower, this is due to a larger proportion saying that the measure is not relevant – for instance, where 32 per cent of Workplace Project users rate "Improving workplace policies, practices or structures" as good, 68 per cent (the remaining sample) say this was not relevant to their case.

Table 19 – Rating the Acas adviser II

How would you rate the Acas adviser in terms of the following?	Very/ fairly good %	Neither good nor poor %	Very/ fairly poor %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Relevant knowledge of your industry/sector	79	-	-	21	81
Relevant knowledge of your local area/region	57	2	-	41	81
Knowledge of the specific subject area	93	5	-	2	81
Being experienced in the types of issues addressed	94	1	-	5	81
Providing enough information in advance	85	1	-	14	81
Helping you to understand the management's point of view *(asked of employee-side respondents only)*	6 (n not %)	-	-	1 (n not %)	7
Helping you to understand the employees' point of view *(asked of employer-side respondents only)*	77	1	-	22	74
Diagnosing workplace problems	59	2	-	39	81
Improving workplace policies, practices or structures	32	-	-	68	81
Implementing new workplace policies, practices or structures	23	1	-	76	81

Base: Workplace Projects service users

4.2 Experience of the project

Participants were asked whether they encountered something during the project that pleased them, or if they had cause to complain.

The largest proportion (38 per cent) of Workplace Projects service users said that they experienced a few small things that pleased them, followed by 36 per cent who said that they experienced neither something that pleased them specifically,

nor a cause for complaint. Around one in five (22 per cent) felt that they saw something particularly good and one per cent had a major complaint or problem.

Participants who experienced something positive – either something particularly good or a few small things that pleased them – were asked an open-ended question to understand what it was that they found useful. The key positive factor was the adviser being knowledgeable and understanding. This was more commonly cited by Workplace Projects users (15 mentions) than it was for Joint Problem Solving Activity service users (one mention), where other factors were more important (for instance, 12 mentioned "the way they helped with negotiations"), reflecting the nature of the different strands of the service. Other factors cited for Workplace Projects include how Acas helped to move things forward (12 users) and Acas being solution-focused (nine users).

Table 20 – Positive experienced with Acas

Thinking about what pleased you, could you tell us what happened?	Number of mentions (n)
They were knowledgeable/understanding	15
Helped to move things forward/moved things forward through communication	12
They were solution-focussed/provided relevant solutions	9
They were approachable/personable/friendly	7
Problem was resolved/successful outcome	5
They were professional/ efficient/organised/reliable	5
Speed of turnaround	5
They gave good/practical advice/guidance/information	4
Training quality/relevance/delivery	4
Quality feedback	3
They were available/easy to contact	3
The way they helped with negotiations	2
They were even-handed/impartial/fair/non-biased	2
Provided a follow-up visit	2
They were experienced	2
Other	3
Base	*45*

Base: Workplace Projects users who said something particularly good or a few small things pleased them about the Acas project

Participants who said they had problems or issues were also asked for greater detail about their negative experience. As these participants numbered just 15 in total – and nine among Workplace project users specifically – there are no substantial sub-group differences to report. All the reasons given for the negative experience were related to internal issues rather than the Acas adviser or Acas service – three participants felt they had a negative experience owing to an inability to reach a

satisfactory conclusion, five put it down to other issues unrelated to the project, and a further one participant attributed it to employee or staff-related issues.

4.3   Achieving objectives

Service users were asked the extent to which they felt that the main objective of the Advisory Project was achieved. Almost nine in ten (88 per cent) Workplace Project service users said that the main objective was either "fully" or "to some extent" achieved, with 11 per cent saying the objective was "to some extent" or "not at all" met. This is a more positive picture than among Joint Problem Solving Activity service users, 75 per cent of whom felt that the objective was fully or to a large extent achieved, with 25 per cent saying that they felt the objectives were met to a limited extent or not at all met.

Table 21 – Project achievement against main objective

To what extent do you feel the main objective of the Acas project was achieved?	Workplace Project service users %	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	All Advisory Project Users %
Fully	**54**	41	48
To a large extent	**33**	34	34
To some extent	**7**	21	14
Not at all	**4**	4	4
Don't know	**1**	-	1
Base	*81*	*73*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project service users

In the 2012 wave of the evaluation, 76 per cent of all Advisory Project users reported that the main objective of their project was met fully or else met to a large extent. This figure is similar to the overall figure of 82 per cent in this evaluation when considering both strands of project together. Similarly, in both waves of the evaluation four per cent said that their objectives were "not at all" met.

Participants who said that the main objective had only been partly achieved or not been achieved at all were asked why they felt that this had been the case. For Workplace Projects this sub-group represents just ten participants, so the findings can be considered as indicative only.

Looking at the results, the most common reason given was that employees were not interested in implementing the solutions arising from the project; a response given by three participants. The main themes were perceived shortcomings with one or both sides involved in the work (either the employer or employee), or the serious nature of the underlying workplace issues. In just one case did a participant feel that Acas did not get to the heart of the problem during the Workplace Project.

4.4   Actions arising

Service users were asked to consider what actions had been taken at their workplace following the Advisory Project. The most common action arising from Workplace Project users was the review or revision of an area of practice, with just under six in ten (58 per cent) saying this had occurred.

Whilst a similar picture was evident for Joint Problem Solving Activities, there were two notable differences:

- Review or revision of policies or procedures was reported by around a third (35 per cent) of Workplace Project service users, compared to nearly half (47 per cent) of Joint Problem Solving Activity users.

- The development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee arose from around one in seven (15 per cent) Workplace Projects, compared to one in three (33 per cent) Joint Problem Solving Activities, reflecting the greater collective nature of these projects.

Taking into account all responses that indicated the project had led to changes in workplace policies[5], in 75 per cent of all Advisory Projects such changes were made. For Workplace Projects users alone, this figure stood at 72 per cent.

Table 22 – Actions arising from the project

Which of the following actions… have been taken as a result of the Acas project?	Workplace Projects service users %	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %	All Advisory Project Users %
Review or revision of an area of practice	**58**	56	57
Introduction of policies and procedures	**36**	37	36
Review or revision of policies and procedures	**35**	47	40
Plans in place to introduce policies and procedures	**30**	33	31
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures	**30**	38	34
NET FIGURE – enacted or planned changes to workplace policies	***72***	80	75
Development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee	**15**	33	23
Base	*81*	*73*	*154*

Base: All Advisory Project service users

---

[5] Measured as the introduction of new policies and procedures, review or revision of an area of practice or policies and procedures, or plans in place to review existing policies or procedures, or to introduce new ones (Q26b-f).

Comparing figures for all Advisory Projects against the 2012 data, the pattern of actions arising remains similar. The most common action taken as a result of an Acas project is the review or revision of an area of practice (57 per cent in this evaluation and 54 per cent in 2012), followed by the review or revision of policies and procedures. The only area where there has been a change greater than five percentage points is in plans being put in place to revise policies or procedures, where the proportion fell from 43 per cent in 2012 to 34 per cent in this evaluation. The net figure for any enacted or planned changes to workplace policies in all Advisory Projects of 75 per cent compares to a net figure of 68 per cent in the 2012 evaluation – a notable if not significant difference.

Figure 6 – Trend analysis – actions arising from the project

Actions arising from Acas projects – trend

Which of the following actions… have been taken as a result of the Acas project?

Action	2016	2012
Review or revision of an area of practice	57%	54%
Review or revision of policies and procedures	40%	45%
Introduction of policies and procedures	36%	35%
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures	34%	43%
Plans in place to introduce policies and procedures	31%	36%
Development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee	23%	18%

Base 2016: 342 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016
Base 2012: 158 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 19 March – 18 May 2012

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

4.5   Sustaining activities

After asking about the actions arising from the project, participants were asked about the extent to which they have been able to sustain these actions after the project had ended. Seven in ten (70 per cent) Workplace Project users felt that the actions arising were sustained fully or to a large extent, with roughly equal proportions giving each answer (33 per cent and 37 per cent respectively).

This is a slightly larger proportion than among Joint Problem Solving Activity service users, 60 per cent of whom were able to sustain activities fully or to a large extent; although this may be due to the different activity profile in each strand of Advisory Projects, as detailed above.

Table 23 - Sustaining activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project

To what extent have you... been able to sustain any activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project, in the period since Acas' involvement?	Workplace Project service users %	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %
Fully	**33**	29
To a large extent	**37**	32
To some extent	**20**	27
Not at all	**4**	7
Don't know	**6**	4
Base	*81*	*73*

Base: All Advisory Project service users

4.6   Relationships between managers and employees

Around nine in ten (89 per cent) Workplace Project service users said that the current relationship between managers and employees was either "very good" (26 per cent) or "fairly good" (63 per cent). This compares favourably to Joint Problem Solving Activity service users, for whom 78 per cent rated this relationship positively. This is likely to reflect the different employment relations profiles of the organisations using each of the services and in particular the background of a collective dispute which often characterises Joint Problem Solving Activities.
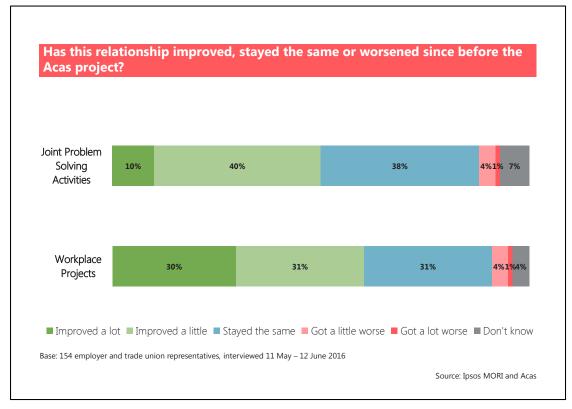
Looking at the views of employer and employee representatives across all Advisory Projects, employee representatives tended to be less positive than employers about the current relationship between managers and employees, with 55 per cent of this small group (31 participants) rating workplace relations as very or fairly good, compared to 91 per cent among employers. This lower score is primarily due to a larger proportion (29 per cent) rating management-staff relations as "neither good nor poor" – although six per cent rated their workplace relations as "fairly poor", and a further six per cent rated them as "very poor". By contrast, no management representatives felt that workplace relations were "very poor".

Participants were also asked if the relationship between management and employees had improved, stayed the same or worsened since their Advisory Project. Six in ten (60 per cent) of Workplace Project service users felt that the relationship between management and employees had improved as a result of the Acas project; whereas 49 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported an improvement. This difference between the two strands of project is most marked at the most positive point of the answer scale, as 30 per cent of Workplace Project participants reported that the employer-employee relationship in their workplace had improved a lot, compared to ten per cent among Joint Problem Solving Activity participants.

The lower proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity users who felt relationships had improved does not mean that outcomes were markedly worse amongst this group, as the proportion of both groups who felt that relationships had become worse was small (both five per cent). Instead, a larger proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity participants felt that relationships had stayed the same: 38 per cent, compared to 31 per cent of Workplace Project users.

Looking across all Advisory Projects again, employee representatives were more likely than management to say the employment relations had improved (65 per cent versus 53 per cent), which may reflect a generally less positive starting outlook among this group.

Figure 7 – Employment relations since the project took place

Has this relationship improved, stayed the same or worsened since before the Acas project?

Joint Problem Solving Activities	10%	40%	38% 4%1% 7%
Workplace Projects	30%	31%	31% 4%1%4%

■ Improved a lot ■ Improved a little ■ Stayed the same ■ Got a little worse ■ Got a lot worse ■ Don't know

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

Among those who felt that workplace relations had improved as a result of the Acas project, there was a near-universal view that this improvement was at least in part attributable to the Acas project (47 out of 49 users).

Table 24 – Importance of the Acas project to improvements in workplace relations

To what extent if any can this improvement be attributed to the Acas project?	Workplace Projects service users
Reported as n, not %	**n**
Fully	4
To a large extent	18
To some extent	25
Not at all	2
Don't know	-
Base	*49*

Base: Workplace Projects service users

Participants were then asked whether or not the Acas project had an impact on specific types of workplace relations, including communication and trust between employees and management and employee morale. For each of these measures, more than half of all Workplace Project service users reported an improvement with

the most positive responses concerning "communication" and "working relationships between employees" (72 per cent and 64 per cent respectively reported an improvement).

Workplace Project service users were more positive about the impacts of the project in five of the six workplace relations areas than Joint Problem Solving Activity participants. Most notably, 58 per cent of this group felt that the project had made employee morale better (and 26 per cent felt this had been made much better) compared to 40 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users.

Further, whilst both user groups were most positive about the impact of the Acas project on communication in the workplace - with 72 per cent of Workplace Project and 63 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users saying that the project made this better. Within these proportions, Workplace Project service users were more strongly positive, with 37 per cent of this group saying the project had made communications much better, compared to 19 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users.

Table 25 – Effects of the project on workplace relations

And do you feel the following are now better, the same, or worse as a result of the Acas project?	Much/A little better %	Same %	Much/A little worse %	Too early to say %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Day-to-day working relationships between management and employees	62	16	4	2	16	81
Working relationships between employees	64	12	2	4	17	81
Fairness in treatment of employees	52	12	-	4	32	81
Employee morale	58	12	1	7	21	81
Trust between management and employees	57	20	2	2	18	81
Communication	72	9	1	2	16	81

Base: Workplace Projects service users

4.7   Overall improvement in employee and management relations

The level of overall improvement in workplace relationships between employees and management forms a key component of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Acas and its sponsor, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). Under this agreement there is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) that an improvement in workplace relationships is registered in 70 per cent of all Advisory Projects.

The improvement figure for the KPI is calculated as the proportion of service users reporting that they had seen improvements in workplace relations in at least one of the areas below[6]:

- Communication;

- Day to day working relationships;

- Trust;

- Employee morale; and

- Fairness in treatment of employees.

Considering just Workplace Projects, the proportion of service users reporting an improvement in at least one of these aspects stands at 86 per cent.

Considering all Advisory Projects (that is both Workplace Projects and also Joint Problem Solving Activities which are explored in chapter three) – which is the basis of the current SLA - the level of overall improvement recorded across all users stands at 82 per cent, twelve percentage points above the current target. This breaks down to a level of 80 per cent amongst management representatives, and 90 per cent amongst employee representatives. This compares to figures of 73 per cent and 70 per cent respectively recorded in 2012 – although care should be taken when making comparisons for the employee sample in particular as this sample has a very small base size in this evaluation (31 participants).

4.8   Quality of service and output

Service users had strongly positive views of the impact of their project on quality of service and output. Across three key areas – the quality of service or output delivered, productivity or efficiency, and meeting objectives or targets – there were no participants who felt that Acas' involvement had made things worse.

However, while none felt that Acas had made things worse, the largest proportion in all three questions said that the question was not relevant to their organisation. In the case of Workplace Projects, 51 per cent said this of quality of service/output, 58 per cent said this of productivity, and 56 per cent said this of meeting objectives or targets.

---

[6] This data is gathered in the Q28 battery of the survey; through sub-questions f, a, e, d, and c respectively

Table 26 – Impacts on quality of service and output

And do you feel the following are now better, the same, or worse as a result of the Acas project?	Much/A little better %	Same %	Much/A little worse %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Too early to say %	Base
Quality of the service/output delivered by your organisation	33	10	-	51	6	81
Productivity or efficiency	25	9	-	58	9	81
Meeting objectives or targets	32	9	-	56	2	81

Base: Workplace Projects service users

In comparison to Joint Problem Solving Activity users, a slightly larger proportion of Workplace Project users said that the Acas project had a positive impact on the quality of service / output delivered by the organisation (33 per cent compared to 22 per cent) and meeting objectives or targets (32 per cent, compared to 21 oer cent).

Workplace Project users were less likely to say that the quality of service or output delivered by their organisation was the same as before the Acas project; ten per cent of this audience felt things had remained the same, compared to 22 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users.

4.9   Measurable impacts

Survey participants were also asked about the impact of the Advisory Project on three specific areas which have a measurable impact on organisational performance – staff turnover, levels of absence and the number of employee grievances. The two strands of Advisory Projects have somewhat different aims, so observed differences between the strands may be related to this fact.

Staff turnover: Fourteen per cent of Workplace Project service users reported an impact on staff turnover – more than the proportion of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users who reported this (two per cent). Of the ten Workplace Project users who said that the Advisory Project had an impact on staff turnover, seven said that it had decreased, two said that it had increased, and one selected "other".

Levels of absence: Fifteen per cent of Workplace Project service users reported an impact on levels of absence. As with staff turnover, this proportion is somewhat higher than it is for Joint Problem Solving Activity service users, of whom six per cent reported an impact on absence. All eleven Workplace Projects users who reported an impact said that the Advisory Project had decreased levels of absence in their organisation.

Number of employee grievances: Almost one quarter (23 per cent) of Workplace Project service users reported an impact on the number of employee grievances. Among the 17 Workplace Project users who felt that the Advisory Project had an

impact on grievance numbers, most (14 users) felt that these had decreased, and just two felt that grievance numbers had increased.

4.10 Further impacts

Following questions on the objectives and impacts of the Acas project, participants were asked whether or not they felt that the project had additional impacts which had not yet been covered. Just over half (55 per cent) of Workplace Project users felt that there were further impacts; and these service users were asked an open-ended question to discover what these were.

The most commonly provided response was that the project improved relationships between employees and management (14 users), followed by those saying that the project gave them a better understanding of what had caused the underlying issues, and ways to avoid it in the future (12 users) and that it gave a better understanding of job roles and responsibilities (9 users).

Table 27 – Further impacts of the project (open response)

What were (the further) impacts of the project? *(Reported as n, not %)*	Workplace Project service users n
Improved working relationships between employees/management	14
Gave a better understanding of what had caused the underlying issues/dispute, and ways to avoid it in the future	12
Gave a better understanding of job roles and responsibilities	9
Improved communication	6
Improved awareness of equality and diversity	5
Improved levels of trust between employees and management	5
Too early to say/work in progress	3
Gave a means to help us improve	3
Improved working conditions	1
Other	4
Base	*41*

Base: Workplace Projects users who said their project had further impacts

4.11 Meeting expectations

Seven in ten (70 per cent) Workplace Project service users reported that their expectations had been "met", whilst 21 per cent were more positive, saying that their expectations had been "exceeded".

The figure below compares the responses of Workplace Project and Joint Problem Solving Activity service users to this question. Whilst the pattern of response is similar, Workplace Project service users were more likely to say that the project had "exceeded" expectations (21 per cent compared to 15 per cent) and less likely to say that their expectations were "not met" (one per cent compared to eight per cent).

Figure 8 – Comparing project experience with expectations

And how did your experience of the Acas project compare with your expectations? Would you say that your expectations were...?

Joint Problem Solving Activities: Exceeded 15%, Met 67%, Partially met 8%, Not met 8%, Don't know 1%

Workplace Projects: Exceeded 21%, Met 70%, Partially met 7%, Not met 1%

Legend: ■ Exceeded ■ Met ■ Partially met ■ Not met ■ Don't know

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Ipsos MORI and Acas

4.12 Satisfaction with the project

Overall, more than nine in ten (94 per cent) Workplace Project Activity service users were satisfied with the project they received from Acas, with 80 per cent "very satisfied" and 14 per cent "fairly satisfied". This compares to 92 per cent overall satisfaction among Joint Problem Solving Activity service users. Although overall levels of satisfaction are similar, it is notable that Workplace Project service users were more likely to say they were "very" satisfied (80 per cent, compared to 68 per cent among Joint Problem Solving Activity users).

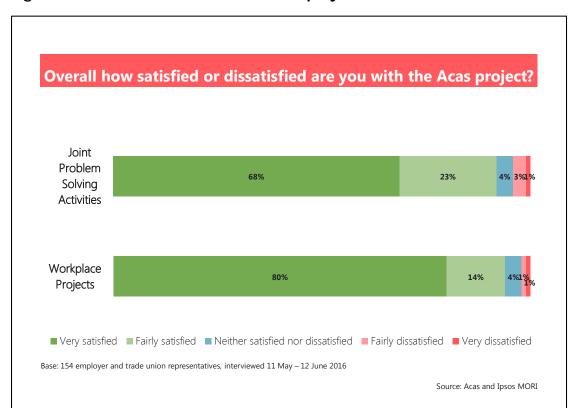**Figure 9 – Overall satisfaction with the project**

Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Acas project?

Joint Problem Solving Activities: Very satisfied 68%, Fairly satisfied 23%, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4%, Fairly dissatisfied 3%, Very dissatisfied 1%

Workplace Projects: Very satisfied 80%, Fairly satisfied 14%, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4%, Fairly dissatisfied 1%, Very dissatisfied 1%

Legend: ■ Very satisfied ■ Fairly satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ■ Fairly dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Acas and Ipsos MORI

Looking at both strands of project together, the overall satisfaction figure for Advisory Projects is 93 per cent, which is broken down as 75 per cent "very" satisfied and 18 per cent "fairly" satisfied. Satisfaction was similarly high in the 2012 evaluation of Advisory Projects – then the overall level of satisfaction was 93 per cent, although the balance of opinion was different, with 63 per cent "very" satisfied and 30 per cent "fairly" satisfied.

4.13 Recommending Acas

In line with the findings on overall satisfaction, a similarly high proportion of participants said that they would recommend Acas in the future, with 98 per cent of Workplace Project service users saying they would recommend Acas to a colleague or professional contact in a similar situation. Likelihood to recommend was similarly high among Joint Problem Solving Activity users, 95 per cent of whom would recommend Acas to a colleague.

The distribution of responses was similar too, with broadly similar proportions of both groups saying they would be "very" likely to recommend Acas (84 per cent of Workplace Project service users, compared to 79 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users).

Table 28 – Likelihood to recommend Acas to a colleague

How likely would you be to recommend Acas to a colleague or other professional contact?	Workplace Project service users %	Joint Problem Solving Activity service users %
Very likely	**84**	79
Fairly likely	**14**	15
Neither likely nor unlikely	**1**	-
Fairly unlikely	**-**	3
Very unlikely	**1**	3
Base	*81*	*73*

Base: All Advisory Project service users

5 Key comparisons across the service strands and considerations for future development

The preceding chapters have reported separately on the satisfaction with, and impacts of, Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects. This analysis has demonstrated that both key user groups are largely positive about the service Acas provides.

This chapter briefly summarises the key findings aggregated across all Advisory Projects and outlines the more notable differences in user assessments between Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects. It then considers both types of Advisory Project together, with an emphasis on measures that look to potential future developments to the advisery service that Acas provides.

5.1 Key metrics for the service overall

Across all Advisory Projects, a positive picture of user experience and service impact can be seen:

- Overall customer satisfaction stood at 93 per cent, consistent with the level of satisfaction recorded in the 2012 evaluation (also reported as 93 per cent).

- More than four in five service users (82 per cent) reported that the main objective of the project had been met either 'fully' or to a 'large extent', which corresponds to a figure of 76 per cent in the 2012 evaluation.

- The pattern of actions taken at service users' workplaces following the project is similar to that observed in 2012. The most common action type reported was "review or revision of an area of practice" (57 per cent, compared to 54 per cent in 2012), followed by the review or revision of policies and procedures. Overall, 75 per cent of all projects led to changes in workplace policies; the equivalent figure in 2012 was 68 per cent.

- Eighty-two per cent of users reported an overall improvement in workplace relationships between employees and management, higher than Acas' target of 70 per cent on this measure[7]. This overall rate (twelve percentage points above the current target) breaks down to a level of 80 per cent among management representatives and 90 per cent among employee representatives, comparing well to the 2012 figures of 73 per cent and 70 per cent respectively (although it should be noted that base sizes here – especially for employees – are small).

5.2 Comparisons between Joint Problem Solving Activities and Workplace Projects

There are some indicative differences between users of the two strands of project. Many of these differences can perhaps be accounted for by the differing contexts of the two types of project and in particular the presence of an ongoing or underlying workplace dispute in the case of Joint Problem Solving Activities. For example, 10 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity users described relationships between managers and employees as "very good", compared to 26 per cent of Workplace Project users.

On the whole, Workplace Project users tended to view the service slightly more favourably than Joint Problem Solving Activity users; for instance, larger proportions of the former reported they were "very satisfied" with the service

---

[7] This key performance measure is calculated as the proportion of users reporting an improvement in at least one of the following five aspects of employment relations: communication, day-to-day working relationships, trust, employee morale and fairness in treatment of employees.

overall (80 per cent compared to 68 per cent), and they were also more likely to say that the relationship between management and employees had improved "a lot" since the project (30 per cent, compared to ten per cent).

Joint Problem Solving Activity service users were however more likely to report having taking action on workplace policies following the project, possibly reflecting the more formal dispute resolution mechanisms they are typically involved in. For instance, 47 per cent of Joint Problem Solving Activity service users reported having reviewed or revised policies and procedures, compared to 35 per cent among Workplace Project users; and 33 per cent reported there had been the development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee, compared to 15 per cent for Workplace Projects.

5.3   Perceived importance of key adviser attributes

Participants across all Acas Advisory Projects were asked how important they felt it was for the adviser delivering their work to be skilled in four key areas:

- relevant knowledge of their industry or sector;

- relevant knowledge of the local area/region;

- knowledge in the specific subject area, and;

- experience in the types of issues being addressed.

Of these adviser attributes, service users regarded "knowledge of the specific subject area" and "experience of the types of issues being addressed" as the most important attributes, followed by "knowledge of the particular industry/sector". The least important of those listed, though still regarded as "very" or "fairly" important by more than half (54 per cent) is "knowledge of the local area/region".

Table 29 – Importance of adviser experience and knowledge

How important would you say it is for the Acas adviser to have…	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Not relevant /Don't know %	Base
…experience in the types of issues being addressed	88	12	-	-	1	154
…knowledge of the specific subject area	88	10	1	1	-	154
…relevant knowledge of your industry/ sector	42	37	16	5	1	154
…relevant knowledge of your local area/ region	21	33	32	13	1	154

Base: All Advisory Project service users

Service users were also asked to rate the performance of their Acas adviser against the same four attributes. As can be seen below, the pattern of responses was similar, with the adviser skills deemed as being most important, also being the attributes which advisers were most likely to be rated as "very good".

Table 30 – Performance of the adviser on key experience and knowledge criteria

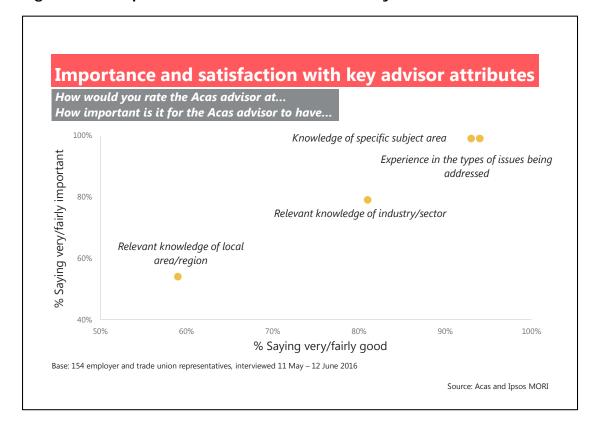| How would you rate the Acas adviser in terms of the following?	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither good nor poor %	Fairly/ very[8] poor %	Not relevant/ Don't know %	Base
Being experienced in the types of issues being addressed	88	6	1	1	4	154
Knowledge of the specific subject area	86	7	3	1	3	154
Relevant knowledge of your industry/ sector	55	27	1	1	17	154
Relevant knowledge of your local area/ region	42	18	3	1	37	154

Base: All Advisory Project service users

By comparing the importance service users assign to these attributes against the level of satisfaction recorded for each it is possible to identify potential priorities for service improvements. For instance, if one element has high importance, yet lower levels of satisfaction compared to other areas, this can be seen as a high priority for improvement.

Analysis of the key Acas adviser attributes shows a positive correlation between the perceived level of importance attached to each attribute and the rating of the adviser in each area. In other words, the more important an element of the service is considered to be, the more likely service users are to rate the Adviser positively on it.

---

[8] N.B. No participants considered their adviser "very poor" on any of these measures.

Figure 10 – Importance and satisfaction with key adviser attributes

Importance and satisfaction with key advisor attributes
How would you rate the Acas advisor at...
How important is it for the Acas advisor to have...

Knowledge of specific subject area

Experience in the types of issues being addressed

Relevant knowledge of industry/sector

Relevant knowledge of local area/region

% Saying very/fairly important

% Saying very/fairly good

Base: 154 employer and trade union representatives, interviewed 11 May – 12 June 2016

Source: Acas and Ipsos MORI

This alignment between the importance assigned to each area, and satisfaction with Acas advisers' performance, suggests that current the delivery of Advisory Projects is prioritising the correct areas of demand among Acas' existing customer base.

5.4   Value for money and third party alternatives

Users of Workplace Projects – which, unlike Joint Project Solving Activities, incur a charge – were asked whether they felt that the Acas Advisory Project represented good value for money. This feedback was strongly positive, with 95 per cent saying that they felt the project was good value for money, including almost half (48 per cent) who felt that the project was *very* good value for money.

Users were similarly positive about Acas' ability to provide affordable assistance; 54 per cent of (charged) Workplace Projects users said they did not think they could have obtained assistance of a similar quality from another provider of employment relations at a price they would have been willing to pay (24 per cent 'definitely not' and 30 per cent 'probably not'). Around one quarter of (charged) Workplace Project users felt they could have obtained this support at a price they were willing to pay (5 per cent 'yes, definitely' and 22 per cent 'yes, probably'). Meanwhile, around one in five (19 per cent) said they didn't know if they could have found such advice, suggesting that for these users Acas is the only option they were aware of.

5.5   Use of online tools

Employers were asked whether or not they had been directed to Acas' online tools and resources as part of their Advisory Project. The question specifically mentioned two diagnostic tools; the Acas Model Workplace and the Acas Productivity Tool, as well as step-by-step guides.

Around half (48 per cent) of all Advisory Project users said that at some point during the project their adviser had recommended that they visit the Acas website to make use of one of these tools, whilst just over one third (36 per cent) said they had not and around one in six (16 per cent) said that they did not know or could not recall if this had happened.

Those employers who stated that they had been directed to an online tool were asked to say at which point(s) in the project this had occurred (participants could provide more than one answer). Just under half (47 per cent) said that this happened before the Advisory Project began and the same proportion (47 per cent) stated that it had happened during the project itself. About one quarter (24 per cent) had been directed online after the Advisory Project and 20 per cent could not remember when it had happened.

Those who said that they had not been directed to Acas' online tools (64 participants) were then asked if they thought this would have been a useful option. The largest group (47 of 64) felt that this would not have been useful, 11 of 64 said that this would have been useful, and six were not sure if it would have been useful or not.