

## **An assignment for ACAS as part of an operational planning process**

### **Introduction and background**

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) is a well known major organisation that aims to enhance the working lives of people by improving employment relations and offering information, advice, training, conciliation, mediation and other services.



ACAS had recently commenced an operational planning process, focusing on a range of activities. The ACAS conciliation officer role had evolved considerably over the years, both in respect of working practices and the nature of the workload undertaken.

In fact, a typical caseload for a conciliation officer had risen by around fifty per cent over a ten year period. As always, ACAS was committed to providing its conciliation service as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the needs of its customers and other stakeholders.

To further this aim, ACAS was proposing to carry out a review of best practice by an internal working group and a review of the conciliation officer role by external consultants. Touchstone Renard was commissioned to undertake the external study.

### **Our task**

The assignment required us to undertake a work measurement study of the individual ACAS conciliation officer role and to provide our client with advice on caseload capacity for a full time conciliation office, taking account of policies, procedures, quality issues, standards and guidance.

ACAS highlighted to us its commitment to meeting customer needs, emphasising the importance of quality and outcome standards and the requirement to ascertain customer and stakeholder views.

The study also needed to review whether the relevant organisational and administrative factors had a bearing on the performance and efficiency on the work of the conciliation service and it was recognised that it should include discussions with ACAS executives, staff at all levels and their representatives.

### **How we went about it**

We selected a team of three of our experienced, principal consultants, with Phil Austin, Touchstone Renard's Managing Director, personally overseeing the assignment.

Having regard to the nature of the conciliation officer role, we decided to adopt both a quantitative and qualitative approach to the task. In particular, we needed to obtain and analyse sufficient data to reflect the conciliation officer activity fully, geographically and at all levels.

Our programme of work would also require and include examination of on-site activities at the ACAS Head Office in London and at selected workplaces throughout the UK. We embarked on a programme, using a range of methods and techniques, including:

- Interviews

- Questionnaire research
- Work flow charting and mapping
- Shadowing and activity sampling
- Review of case files
- Examination of statistical data

### **What we achieved**

We delivered our findings to our client in the form of a structured written report and a presentation to ACAS senior managers. This provided them with the information that they needed to achieve their goals going forward, including the introduction of a range of measures to better align the conciliation service to the needs of ACAS customers and stakeholders.

### **Our client's thoughts on the assignment**

Phil Austin was delighted when the Operations Director of ACAS issued the following statement:

*'ACAS have recently used Touchstone Renard's assistance to carry out a study relating to their operational planning process. The successfully completed project has provided a robust, practical outcome that will inform our future organisational planning for years to come.'*