

# People Management

## Third of workplaces lack mediation skills, Acas warns

By Freddie Clemo, 25 June 2026

Many employers still lack the mediation skills needed to stop disagreements escalating into formal disputes, research has found.

A third (33 per cent) of Britain's workplaces do not have staff with the necessary mediation skills to resolve a workplace conflict, rising to 40 per cent among SMEs, according to a survey of 1,000 UK employers by workplace dispute body Acas.

Kevin Rowan, Acas director of dispute resolution, said mediation allowed organisations to manage disputes informally without the need to resort to costly formal action.

"It is not about judging who is wrong or who is right; it is about bringing people in a disagreement together to agree on a way of working together," he explained.

Rowan added that while mediation was a valuable skill, too few workers believed their organisation had the skills needed to use it effectively. "We encourage employers to make sure their managers have the confidence and skill to mediate successfully," he said.

A previous Acas report also found 26 per cent of workers thought managers and employee representatives were ineffective at preventing and resolving conflict.

Alex Efthymiades, director and founder of conflict management consultancy Consensio, said effective mediation skills were at the "cornerstone of how people should be communicating with each other in organisations".

She explained that while conflict was normal, issues escalated when workers did not have the skills to manage it properly. "The cost of ignoring this is overwhelming. Badly managed conflict can lead to a loss of productivity and stress, and the ripple effect can spread across organisations," she said.

Efthymiades added that if workers did not have the skills to address issues they may do it in a clumsy or unhelpful way, which can escalate tension and potentially lead to tribunal claims. "It's more important than ever that workers have the tools to have difficult conversations in a constructive way," she said.

The issue has become even more pressing as a result of the tribunal backlog, with some cases unlikely to be heard until 2030.

### **Rise in workplace conflict**

The findings come as workplace conflict reached its highest reported level last year, with 44 per cent of UK workers experiencing some form of dispute or disagreement at work in the 12 months to November 2025, according to Acas.

Conflict at work contributed to higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression in almost two in three (57 per cent) employees, with half (49 per cent) reporting a drop in motivation or commitment following disputes.

While rates of workplace conflict were high across the board, the report found levels were higher at SMEs, at 46 per cent.

Efthymiades said workplace conflict had become more common because technology had made it harder to separate work and personal communication.

“People are more comfortable sharing views with colleagues and on social media, and at the same time political views have become more polarised,” she explained.

### **Building mediation skills**

Nicola Cross, client relationship manager at conflict resolution specialists CMP, said employers would benefit from setting up an established in-house mediation service that employees can turn to before disputes escalate.

“Mediation then becomes part of the culture, commonly used and trusted, with nothing remarkable or uncomfortable about it. Less and less management time is needed; issues are picked up and dealt with early,” she said.

Cross also urged employers to invest in everyday communication skills, such as listening, empathy and constructive conversations.

“The greatest impact is where organisations take a whole-system approach. The result? Not just fewer conflicts – but better relationships at work,” she added.

This investment could also mean avoiding costs down the line, Efthymiades said: “The sooner you address things, the easier they are to resolve.”

For SMEs with limited training budgets, she recommended using short, regular learning sessions to keep mediation and conflict management skills fresh.