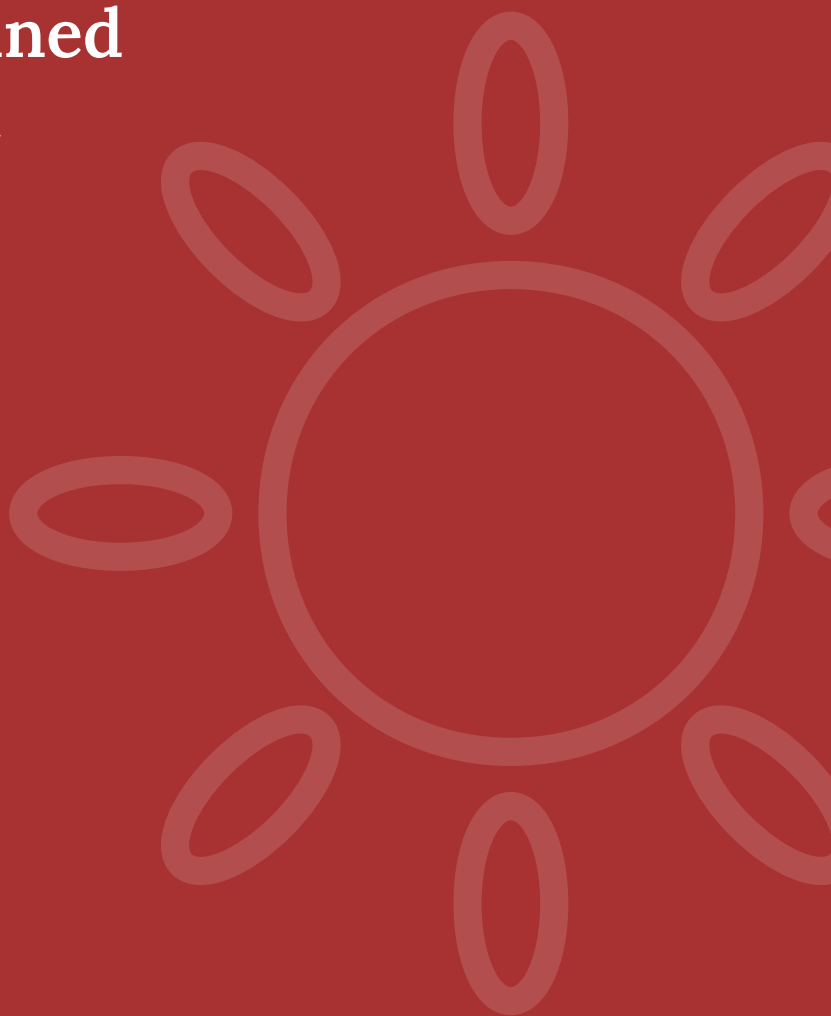


EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL

ACAS Early Conciliation, Explained

The mandatory step before any tribunal claim



What Early Conciliation actually is

ACAS — the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service — is a free, independent public body. Early Conciliation is its process for trying to resolve a workplace dispute before it ever reaches a tribunal.

It's mandatory, not optional

Before you can submit almost any employment tribunal claim, you must first notify ACAS. Skip it, and the tribunal rejects your ET1 outright.

It's free and confidential

Nothing you say to a conciliator is passed to the tribunal, and there is no charge at any point.

The exceptions are narrow

A handful of claim types are exempt — certain interim relief applications, some national security matters. For unfair dismissal, discrimination, unpaid wages, redundancy pay and whistleblowing, it applies without exception.

If you're unsure whether your situation is exempt, start Early Conciliation anyway — it costs nothing to begin, and it protects your deadline while you work it out.

How it works, step by step

1 You notify ACAS

Online at acas.org.uk or by phone on 0300 123 1100. Takes a few minutes, and this date becomes “Day A”.

2 A conciliator contacts your employer

They explore, confidentially, whether the dispute can be resolved without a tribunal — sometimes through a settlement called a COT3.

3 Up to six weeks of conciliation

ACAS has up to one calendar month, extendable by 14 days if both sides agree to keep talking.

4 A certificate is issued — “Day B”

Settled or not, ACAS issues an Early Conciliation certificate with a unique reference number. You need it to file an ET1.

Most people either settle during this window or come out of it with the certificate they need to proceed. Either way, you're better off for having started — which is the subject of the next page.

How it pauses your deadline

This is the detail that catches people out: Early Conciliation doesn't just run alongside your tribunal deadline — it actively pauses it.

Day A

The day ACAS receives your notification. Your time limit stops running from this date.

Day B

The day ACAS issues your certificate. Your time limit starts running again.

After Day B

You get either the remainder of your original time limit, or at least one calendar month from the certificate date — whichever gives you more time. It's automatic; you don't have to apply for it.

Why this matters in practice

In the full Employment Tribunal Survival Guide, Marcus contacted ACAS later than he should have — with only 18 days left on his original deadline. Because his certificate was issued 14 days later, the “at least one calendar month” rule gave him until 29 June instead, comfortably enough time to file properly. The mechanic can genuinely save a claim that looks too late on the surface.

What happens next

Once you have your Early Conciliation certificate, there are two roads from here:

You settle

Many disputes resolve during or shortly after conciliation, often through a COT3 — a legally binding agreement reached through ACAS, without a tribunal ever getting involved.

You proceed to an ET1

If it doesn't resolve, your certificate number unlocks your tribunal claim form. Mini-guide 3 covers building the ET1 and what happens after you file.

£0

The cost of Early Conciliation and of filing an ET1 once you have your certificate — whichever road you end up on.

startmyclaim.ai/employment-tribunal — the free Deadline Checker tracks your Early Conciliation dates automatically, so you always know exactly where you stand.

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