

Fit for Work Service

This newsletter provides details of the government's Fit for Work service (FFW).

The FFW will be introduced on a phased basis and is due to be completed by May 2015.

The FFW provides:

- Free health and work advice through its website and telephone advice line to help with absence prevention.
- Free referral for an occupational health assessment for employees who have reached, or whose GP expects them to reach, four weeks of sickness absence.

Online and telephone advice

FFW can be contacted online through its website, or by telephone, as many times as required. It can give employers advice about work-related health matters (when an employee's health condition is affecting them at work) or when an employee is off sick from work. The advice can help identify adjustments that could help an employee remain in, or return to, work.

Referral for an occupational health assessment

Employees will normally be referred to FFW by their GP, but employers can also make a referral. It is suggested that a referral to FFW is the "default" position. However, it is not mandatory since it is dependent both on the employee's consent and on the referring GP, or employer, considering that there is a reasonable likelihood of the employee making at least a phased return to work.

The trigger point for referral is four weeks' absence. This includes absence self-certified by the employee.

There is no limit on the number of eligible employees that can be referred to FFW by an employer, but an employee can only be referred for one assessment in any 12-month period.

Assessment by FFW

FFW is delivered by registered occupational healthcare professionals

If you would like to discuss any of the matters raised in this newsletter please contact:

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The information in this newsletter is not meant as a substitute for advice on particular issues and is written in general terms. You should seek specific advice before taking any action based on the information in this newsletter.

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This newsletter outlines the law at the date of writing in March 2015

who either:

- Have occupational health qualifications.
- Have occupational health experience.
- Are able to demonstrate experience and skills appropriate to working in an occupational health context.

They will be trained, "appropriately supervised" and under the overall direction of an accredited specialist in occupational medicine. They will also have access to professionals with appropriate competencies in musculoskeletal and mental health conditions.

Return to Work Plan

The outcome of an assessment will be reflected in a Return to Work Plan that, with the employee's consent, will be provided to their GP and employer (via email or, where appropriate, by post). The employee can ask for specific parts of their Plan to be removed before it is shared with their GP or employer.

Discharge from FFW

Employees will automatically be discharged from FFW:

- Two weeks after they have returned to work (including beginning a phased return).
- On the date when FFW decide that there is no further assistance they can offer the employee, which will be either when the employee has been with the service for three months, or at the point that FFW decides that the employee will be unable to return to work for three months or more.

Tax exemption for recommended medical treatments

The government has introduced a tax exemption of up to £500 (per tax year, per employee) on medical treatments recommended to help employees return to work. This will be applicable to treatments recommended by health professionals at FFW and health professionals within employer-arranged occupational health services. The exemption will not need to be claimed from HMRC but will be applied by the employer at the time they provide the benefit.