

Free occupational health assessments to go

In the know



The Government has announced the cessation of the service which provides employers with a free occupational health assessment for employees on sick leave. This service, called Fit For Work, will no longer take new referrals although any employee already referred will receive the full service. Here, we take a look at what this means.

Scheme introduced in 2015

- In a recent announcement, the Government confirmed that it will remove the Fit For Work Service which provided employers with the opportunity to get free assistance with employees who were on long term sick leave;
- Fit For Work was introduced in September 2015. Employees who were, or who were expected to be, on sick leave for longer than 4 weeks could be referred to the scheme by their GP for an occupational health assessment. A Return to Work Plan would be compiled giving the employer information about how it may support the employee back to work;
- Ultimately, the aim of the scheme was to get employees back to work quicker.

Scheme was underused

- CIPD statistics show that only 35% of GPs had referred someone to the scheme;
- 40% of GPs said that no-one they had referred to the scheme had successfully returned to work.

New entrants no longer accepted

- No more referrals have been accepted in to the scheme in England & Wales since 15th December 2017. Anyone referred before that date will receive the full service meaning that the service will shut down around March 2018. The Scotland service is expected to close in May 2018.

What this means for employers

- Free occupational health reports and plans to help sick employees return to work will no longer be available for employers. Expert advice on managing employee sickness and access to occupational health assistance is now even more valuable;
- The Government has announced new measures to help disabled candidates into work including personalised financial and employment support;
- A review of statutory sick pay will be undertaken to “better support phased return to work” after sickness absence.

Croner Tips



An independent occupational health report will provide employers with an expert view on a sick employee's capabilities from a work perspective. Because of this, it can be more valuable than a GP report;

Sometimes more than one report will be necessary to convince an Employment Tribunal that dismissal of a sick employee was a reasonable decision to take.

The content of this briefing is correct at the time of publishing.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this article