Medical Fit Notes – FAQs

Q: A member of staff has produced a ‘may be fit for work’ note, what happens now?

A: The statement will give the GPs general recommendations on the types of changes to duties or work arrangements that will allow their patient to work safely whilst unwell. Line managers will usually need to discuss these with the member of staff to decide and agree specific adjustments or support measures.

Line managers may contact an OH Adviser if they are uncertain over what changes or support measures are needed to implement the GPs recommendations.

If a return to work is possible the line manager should agree any temporary changes to the member of staff’s job/hours and what support will be provided and for how long and inform Human Resources of what has been agreed. If the member of staff’s job involves exposures to hazards, the risk assessment for the work should be reviewed.

Q: Can a medical statement advising that the member of staff is ‘fit for work’ be requested?

A: No. Unlike the sick note, the statement of fitness for work does not include the option for doctors to advise someone that they are fully fit for work. A person no longer needs to be signed back to work by their GP at the end of certificate, even if the GP has indicated on the certificate that they wish to see their patient for review. Where there are concerns over a member of staff’s fitness to resume full duties at the end of a GP’s fit note, line managers should discuss these concerns with an Occupational Health Adviser.

Q: Is the advice on the statement binding?

A: No, although a GP’s recommendations will normally be accepted unless there is a health and safety or other reason why they cannot be.

Q: How long do any amended duties or workplace adaptations have to last for?

A: They will need to be in place for at least the period of time covered by the GP’s fit for work note.

When agreeing a return to work plan, the length of time any amended duties or support is for will be confirmed in writing by HR.

Q: If the member of staff’s GP recommends a gradual return to work, how does this affect the member of staff’s pay?

A: In line with Part 2, page 14, of the Sickness Absence Policy, where there is a gradual return to work following sickness, pay will be at the person’s current rate of sick pay/leave or calculated from the number of hours worked – whichever is the greater.
Q: When a Member of Staff produces a ‘fit note,’ does the line manager need to carry out a risk assessment prior to their return?

A: As a general guideline, if the work the member of staff will be carrying out is hazardous, risk assessments for the work should be reviewed to consider whether the effects of the member of staff’s illness, injury or treatment they are undertaking may increase the risk of accident or injury. If so, appropriate additional precautions should be put in place, e.g. ensuring assistance is available for carrying out tasks that rely on physical exertion, reducing the pace or load of a physically demanding task, temporarily re-allocating a hazardous task to another person, or reviewing work routines to allow for more rest breaks. Someone recovering from a stress-induced illness may need to be temporarily redeployed to duties not immediately exposing them to situations that may have provoked their illness. Someone taking medicines that could affect alertness or concentration may need to be temporarily restricted from work involving use of machinery, driving or work at height. More specific advice may be obtained from the College Occupational Health Service if necessary.

Q: Can the member of staff return to work before the end of an ‘unfit for work’ note?

A: Yes, it may be that the member of staff has recovered faster than the doctor expected or that College can support the member of staff in ways the doctor was not aware of. If it is appropriate for the member of staff to return to work and they wish to do this, they do not have to wait until the end of the statement period to do so. Where there are concerns over a member of staff’s fitness to resume full duties either prior to or at the end of a GP’s fit note, line managers should discuss these concerns with an Occupational Health Adviser.

Q: If it is not possible to implement a GP’s recommendations on the fit for work note, does the member of staff need to return to the doctor for a revised statement?

A: No. The doctor’s statement will be used as if they had advised that the member of staff was ‘unfit for work’.

Q: Who should line managers contact if they do not understand the advice on the Statement?

A: Please contact an Occupation Health Adviser for assistance with interpreting advice given on the Statement.

Q: What action needs to be taken if a GP recommends an occupational health referral for a member of staff?

A: The line manager should discuss this with an Occupational Health Adviser.