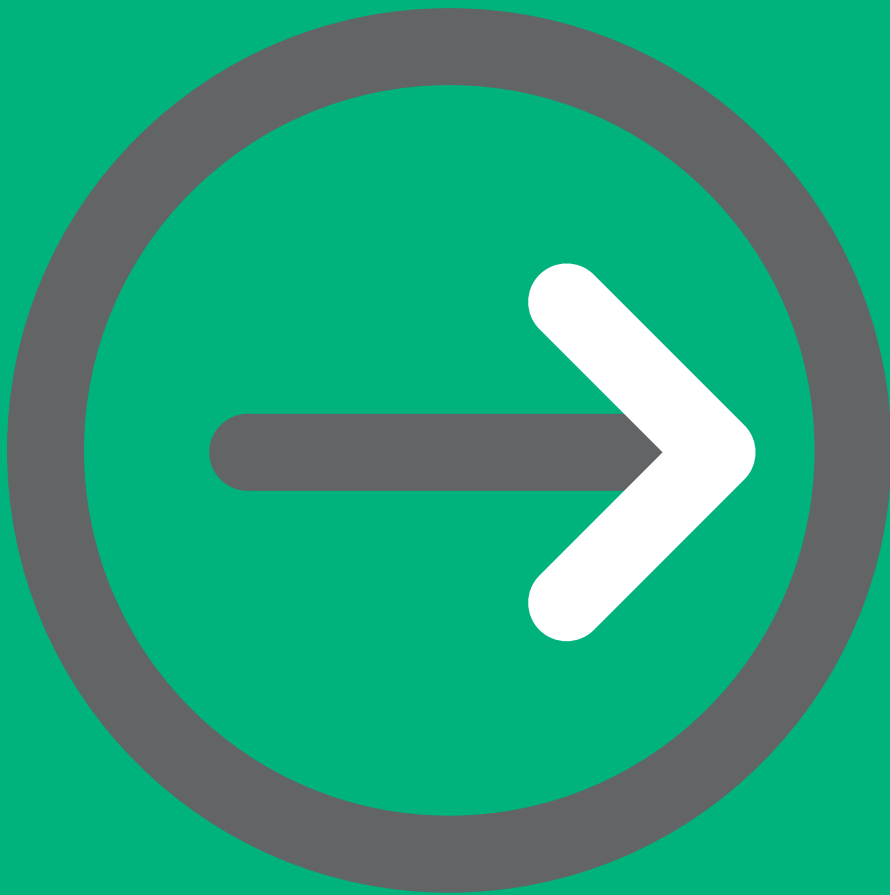




Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Fit for Work

Guidance for GPs



For details on when referrals to the Fit for Work assessment can be made in your area please visit: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-for-work-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-for-work-guidance)



# Fit for Work – summary guidance for GPs

Fit for Work provides general work related health advice through a phone number and a website for anyone (including GPs) who needs advice on health and work related matters.

**Advice:** Fit for Work can give you and your patient advice for all work related health matters via a website and telephone line.

**Referral for an occupational health assessment:** Fit for Work will also give you the opportunity to refer your patient for individually tailored advice from an occupational health professional if your patient is or is likely to be off sick from work for four weeks or more. Once referred, this health professional will talk to your patient about their health, assess their circumstances and create a plan with their agreement providing recommendations to help them back into work (this is a Return to Work Plan).

To see where the service is currently live and where it will be rolling out soon please visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

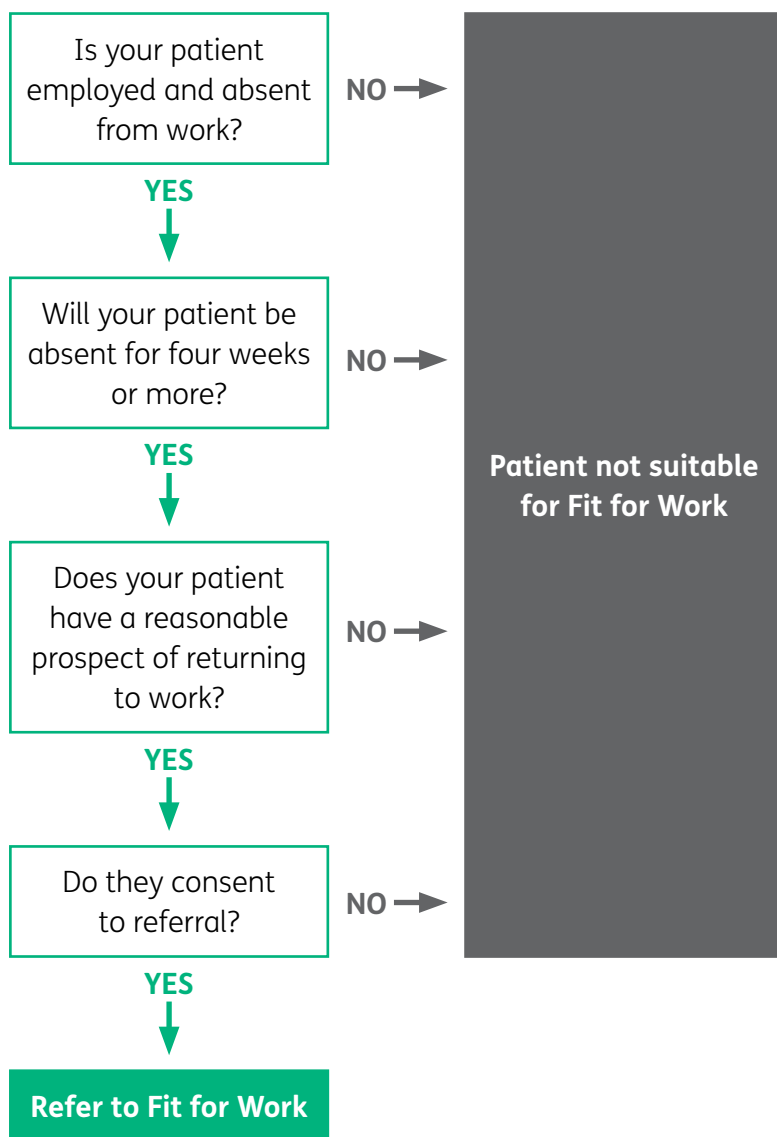
## Fit for Work is:

- **Free** – you, your patients and their employers pay nothing for using Fit for Work services
- **Quick** – an occupational health professional will contact your patients within two working days of a referral for an assessment by Fit for Work
- **Supportive** – your patients will receive help to return to work and improve their health outcomes. Fit for Work advice will complement your advice and reduce the need for fit notes for your patients

By referring your patients to Fit for Work, you can help support your patients move back into work sooner and reduce the chances of your patients falling out of work.

**Fit for Work guidance for GPs will be regularly updated as referrals to the Fit for Work assessment rolls-out across Great Britain**

# Should I refer my patient to a Fit for Work assessment?



**England and Wales:**  
[www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)  
0800 032 6235

**Welsh Language Line:**  
[www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)  
0800 032 6233

**Scotland:**  
[www.fitforworkscotland.scot](http://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)  
0800 019 2211

Note: Patients in Scotland – SCI gateway referral details will be available shortly.

# A detailed guide to Fit for Work for GPs

We've developed this guide with help from doctors, patients and employers. It is designed to help you make the best use of Fit for Work and to help your patients return to work as quickly as appropriate.

## About this guide

This guide gives you information on Fit for Work, including:

- What is Fit for Work?
- Why has Fit for Work been introduced?
- Who provides Fit for Work?
- How can Fit for Work benefit me and my patient?
- Patient eligibility criteria
- How do I access Fit for Work?
- What happens once I make a referral to Fit for Work?
- Frequently Asked Questions

**This guidance has been developed in conjunction with practising doctors, professional bodies, and employer and employee representative groups. The guidance has also been developed in conjunction with ACAS.**

# What is Fit for Work?

## Fit for Work has two elements:

**Advice:** Fit for Work can give you, your patients or their employers advice about work-related health matters e.g. when a patient's health condition is affecting them at work or when they are off sick from work. This might involve providing help with issue identification, information on the type of adjustments which could help patients stay in or return to work, or more general work-related health advice. This advice will be available on-line and via a phone service. The advice service is targeted at employees, employers and GPs, but others, such as self-employed patients can also contact the service.

**Referral for an occupational health assessment:** Fit for Work will provide GPs with a referral route to access a supportive occupational health assessment for patients who you think could be absent from work for four weeks or more. Patients will be contacted within two working days of a referral by a Fit for Work occupational health professional. They will receive a holistic, biopsychosocial assessment. This assessment will usually take place over the telephone<sup>2</sup>. Face to face assessments will be available for the limited number of patients who will require them.

The Fit for Work occupational health professional<sup>3</sup> will seek to identify all of the obstacles preventing the patient from returning to work and agree a plan with the patient that is designed to address each obstacle to enable a safe and sustained return to work.

This **Return to Work Plan** will reflect the assessment and provide work-focussed advice and recommendations which have been discussed with the patient to help them return to work more quickly. The Return to Work Plan will be sent via email or post (where appropriate) to you, the patient and the patient's employer, subject to the patient's consent. When you make a referral, you can access the Return to Work Plan via web link, subject to employee consent. From Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland employers will also be able to make a referral and can access the Return to Work Plan in the same way. GPs in Scotland can access Return to Work Plans via SCI gateway.

The Return to Work Plan can help you with conversations with patients in relation to their absence and also, if appropriate help you to identify suitable interventions and support that you could offer to your patient.

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<sup>2</sup> Burton, K., Kendall, N., McCluskey, S. and Dibben, P. (2013). Telephonic support to facilitate return to work: what works, how, and when?

<sup>3</sup> Occupational health professionals will be medically qualified and have relevant occupational health qualifications and/or experience

# Why has Fit for Work been introduced?

Being absent from work has consequences for patients, their employers and you as GPs.

Early intervention is important. The longer someone is off work the harder it is for them to return to any type of employment. Evidence suggests that once someone has been off for four weeks the likelihood of them returning reduces significantly. Being out of work for four weeks or more can impact on an individual's mental as well as physical health even if the original reason for their ill health was a physical one. There is also evidence to suggest if someone is off long term it can impact on their family's health as well.

GPs write millions of fit notes a year. Most patients go back to work quite quickly and do not need more specialist advice. However specialist advice about how to help someone return to or remain in work is something GPs have identified as being important for them. Fit for Work can help provide this timely advice for GPs and, whilst a patient is engaged with Fit for Work it can reduce the need to write repeat fit notes.

Employers will also benefit for more timely advice from Fit for Work. Employers pay up to £8.9 billion a year in sick pay and associated costs. Specialist advice about how to support employees more effectively could help employers save £100 million a year in sick pay costs.

Dame Carol Black and David Frost CBE's 'Health at Work – an independent review into sickness absence'<sup>4</sup> identified the importance of good quality occupational health advice in reducing the number of days lost to sickness absence. Fit for Work responds to The Black/Frost Report.

Fit for Work will help doctors benefit from specialist advice, employers who need advice to support their employees to return to work and most importantly help patients return to or remain in work and aid their recovery.

## Who is providing Fit for Work?

In England and Wales Fit for Work is being delivered by Health Management Limited. In Scotland, Fit for Work Scotland is being delivered by the Scottish Government via NHS Scotland.

**Fit for Work**

**Fit for Work**  
Scotland

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<sup>4</sup> Black, C. and Frost, D. (2011) Health at Work – an independent review of sickness absence

# How can Fit for Work help me and my patients?

## **Fit for Work provides:**

- access to independent quality advice and a specialist occupational health assessment
- a free and rapid early intervention service that is easy to use and provides support for you, your patient and your patient's employer via the Return to Work Plan
- removal of the need to issue repeat fit notes where there is a Return to Work Plan in place
- support to improve health outcomes for patients through a faster return to work
- assistance in managing your patient's understanding about the impact of their condition on their fitness for work
- support in managing difficult return to work consultations
- help which improves your patient's chances of keeping their job
- information to help your patient and their employer to discuss how they could be supported at work and in returning to work



# Assessment referral: Patient eligibility criteria

You should consider referring all patients who are eligible to Fit for Work.

The criteria for referring patients to Fit for Work are:

- those patients of any age in paid employment
- the patient is likely to be absent from work for four weeks or more
- the patient has a reasonable prospect of returning to work (if unsure please make a referral to Fit for Work or contact the advice line)
- the patient has not already been referred within the last 12 months and has not received a Return to Work Plan
- the patient consents to the referral

Your patients will not be eligible for referral to the assessment part of Fit for Work if they:

- live outside England, Wales and Scotland
- are not absent from work
- are unemployed or self-employed
- have been referred within the last 12 months and a Return to Work Plan has been issued

You may want to consider whether your patient is receiving employer occupational health support which is sufficient to enable them to return to work, prior to making a referral.

The following patients may not be suitable for a referral for a Fit for Work assessment:

- individuals who, in your judgement, will not be able to return to work (if unsure please make a referral to Fit for Work or contact the advice line)
- terminally ill patients, unless in your clinical judgement a referral and return to work would be possible and beneficial for the patient

## Other circumstances

There may be circumstances where you consider it more appropriate to refer a patient for a Fit for Work assessment later in their absence – perhaps because there have been improvements to their health and they have a better prospect of returning to work.

You may also refer patients to a Fit for Work assessment before four weeks of sickness absence if you think they will be sick for at least four weeks and earlier support from Fit for Work will benefit them.

In all cases, making a referral should be considered as the default position for patients who are likely to be absent for four weeks or more: if you are in any doubt about the merits of a referral, please make a referral or contact the Fit for Work Advice line.

# How do I access Fit for Work?

You can access Fit for Work advice and, when available, also make a referral for an assessment by using the following web links and telephone numbers below:

For details on when referrals to the Fit for Work assessment can be made in your area please visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## England and Wales

- [www.fitforwork.org](https://www.fitforwork.org)
- 0800 032 6235
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
- Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

## Welsh Language Line

- [www.fitforwork.org](https://www.fitforwork.org)
- 0800 032 6233
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
- Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

## Scotland

- [www.fitforworkscotland.scot](https://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)
- 0800 019 2211
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm
- Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm

# What happens once I make a referral to a Fit for Work assessment?

Fit for Work will contact your patient to conduct a telephone assessment at a convenient time for them (within two working days of receipt of referral or five working days for a face to face consultation if it is deemed appropriate).

Where a face to face assessment is required (expected to be in small minority of cases) Fit for Work will pay reasonable travel expenses at your patient's request. Your patient will need to speak to Fit for Work for further details on how to make a claim for these expenses.

The biopsychosocial holistic assessment will be carried out by an occupational health professional who will also act as a case-manager and a single point of contact for your patient. The case manager will ask your patient to confirm some basic information in order to verify their identity and will ask the patient for their consent to engage with the service.

During the assessment, the occupational health professional will ask your patient to describe their condition, their job role and any factors – including health, work, home or any other relevant issues – which are affecting their return to work.

The occupational health professional will develop a Return to Work Plan which will reflect the assessment and include advice and recommendations for interventions which are appropriate for your patient in order to support them back to work. The recommendations are not compulsory and you will retain full clinical responsibility for your patient.

Your patient will discuss the contents of the Return to Work Plan with the occupational health professional. They will be asked by the health professional whether they consent to the plan being shared with you and / or their employer.

If your patient consents to sharing their return to work plan, you will be able to access their Return to Work Plan via a web link sent to you by email and electronically via SCI gateway if you are a GP in Scotland. Similar arrangements will apply for your patient and their employer to access their copies of the Return to Work Plan. Where appropriate a Return to Work Plan will be sent to GPs, employers and patients by post (e.g. If they do not have an email address).

Where your patient has consented to the plan being shared with their employer, the employer and their employee will consider the recommendations on how best to support the employee back into work.

The employer can accept the Return to Work Plan as sufficient information for purposes of Statutory Sick Pay in place of a fit note.

The case manager will contact the patient at an arranged point to check if the plan is on course and in addition will contact the patient shortly after the anticipated return to work date. If necessary the case manager will arrange for a further assessment by Fit for Work, for example if the patient has not returned to work as anticipated. The Return to Work Plan may also be revised to reflect any changes that are necessary.

As with a fit note, a patient can return to work before any date predicted for their return by Fit for Work.

Patients will automatically be discharged from Fit for Work:

- two weeks after they have returned to work (including a phased return)
- on the date Fit for Work decide that there is no further support they can offer the patient: this will be either when the patient has been with the service for three months or at the point Fit for Work decides the patient will be unable to return to work for three months or more.

Patients, GPs and employers will still have access to the advice line for additional support.

### **For further information please access:**

- Frequently Asked Questions for Employees (page 13)
- England and Wales: [www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)
- Scotland: [www.fitforworkscotland.scot](http://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)

# Frequently asked questions for GPs

## This section is split into the following categories:

- (a) Providers
- (b) Referrals and eligibility
- (c) Consent and data protection
- (d) Employer involvement
- (e) Return to work plans
- (f) GPs involvement
- (g) Further information

## Providers

### Who is providing Fit for Work?

In England and Wales Fit for Work is being delivered by Health Management Limited. In Scotland, Fit for Work Scotland is being delivered by the Scottish Government via NHS Scotland.

### What qualifications will the supplier have?

Fit for Work is delivered by registered occupational healthcare professionals who have occupational health qualifications; have occupational health experience; or are able to demonstrate experience and skills appropriate to working in an occupational health context. Their expertise will ensure that Fit for Work will identify the full range of issues preventing a return to work and provide appropriate advice in line with best practice.

Occupational health professionals delivering Fit for Work will be appropriately supervised and the service will be under the overall direction of an accredited specialist in Occupational Medicine.

Training will be provided to all occupational health professionals delivering Fit for Work.

### What is a case manager?

A case manager is an occupational health professional who will be the patient's point of contact throughout Fit for Work. This is the same person who will be your contact for any discussions over recommendations contained within the Return to Work Plan.

### Will the provider pay travel expenses for a face to face assessment?

Your patient will need to speak to the case manager at the time of booking or assessment for further details on how to claim.

## Referrals and eligibility

### Why should I refer patients to Fit for Work?

You and your patient will receive free professional and independent advice for many issues including:

- what adjustments are needed to support your patient
- how to interpret the Return to Work Plan
- how you and your patient's employer can support the individual back to work
- what the individual can do to support themselves to return to work
- how to prevent another period of sickness absence occurring

Using Fit for Work enables you to:

- effectively manage your patient's expectations about their capability for work
- give a clear clinical assessment to your patient about the impact of their condition on their fitness for work
- improve the likelihood of your patient keeping their job, by helping them to discuss ways they could be supported at work with their employer
- support the vital role that work can play in maintaining your patient's health
- offer your patient the use of an independent service which is quick and easy to use as it has a telephone assessment

### When might a referral for an assessment be necessary?

When a patient has reached four weeks absence or is likely to reach four weeks absence. A referral to Fit for Work may provide them, you and their employer support to help them back into work.

### Does self certification of sickness absence count towards four weeks sickness absence under Fit for Work?

Yes, self certification of sickness absence will count towards 4 weeks of sickness absence for the purposes of Fit for Work eligibility requirements.

### Who can use Fit for Work?

**Advice Line** – anybody can access the advice line whether they are an employee, employer, GP or any other individual, including the self-employed.

**Referral for an Assessment** – GPs can refer patients who are employees who have reached four weeks of sickness absence or who they judge are likely to reach four weeks of absence. Where a GP has not referred and the patient has reached or exceeded four weeks sickness absence their employer may make a referral (when available). Visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) for further information on where the service is currently live and where it will be rolling out, including the availability of employer referrals.

### What are the eligibility requirements for a referral?

You should consider referring all patients who have been off work for four weeks or who you judge are likely to be off for four weeks or more, and who, with further help, you think have a reasonable prospect of a return to work.

Patients eligible for referral to Fit for Work are those who:

- are living in England, Wales and Scotland;
- are in paid employment;
- are being referred by their GP or employer (when available);
- are absent from work;
- have a reasonable prospect of returning to work;
- have not been previously referred to Fit for Work within a 12 month period; and
- have provided consent for the referral

### When might a referral for an assessment not be necessary?

The following patients may not be suitable to be referred to Fit for Work but you should use your clinical judgement to make a decision:

- individuals who, in your clinical judgement, do not have a realistic prospect of returning to work
- terminally ill patients, unless in your clinical judgement a referral and return to work would be possible and beneficial for the patient
- hospital in patients
- patients in an acute phase of their medical condition

### Can someone be referred if they have not been sick for four weeks or have been sick for longer than four weeks?

You can refer a patient earlier or later than four weeks if:

- you judge your patient could be absent for four weeks. In this case an earlier referral may help shorten their sickness absence
- you judge that a referral is not appropriate at four weeks, but could be suitable at six weeks (e.g. when recovering from a hip replacement surgery)

You can exercise your professional judgement about the clinical appropriateness of a referral. However, if you have any doubt about a referral you should contact Fit for Work for advice.

Once employer referrals go live employers are only able to refer after a sickness absence of four weeks.

### What if your patient is self-employed, unemployed, or is experiencing short spells of sickness absence?

These groups cannot be referred for an assessment but you and they are able to access the advice service.

**What happens if your patient's circumstances change during the referral process e.g. develops a further health condition - is made redundant etc.**

On going clinical responsibility for the employee will remain with the GP. If there is a change in relation to any factors Fit for Work may revise the Return to Work Plan to take account of new information. Fit for Work will also consider whether discharge from the service is appropriate if no further support is needed.

**Will Fit for Work account for specialist conditions?**

Fit for Work uses a biopsychosocial, holistic approach, which takes into account the full range of work, health, home and any other issues that may be preventing a patient from returning to work. This applies to all health conditions. In addition the assessment service will have access to specialists in musculoskeletal and mental health conditions.

**Can a patient be referred to Fit for Work for a long term or fluctuating condition e.g. cancer?**

Yes they can be referred for a long term fluctuating condition if they meet the eligibility criteria.

**What will happen if my patient can't travel for a face to face assessment?**

Fit for Work will take into account situations where a patient is unable to travel to a face to face assessment. Alternative arrangements will be considered.

**Can a Return to Work Plan be updated by the case manager during the three month period?**

Yes. A case manager can arrange for a further assessment and provide a revised Return to Work Plan if, in their clinical judgement, they deem this appropriate.

**How often can a referral be made to Fit for Work?**

The advice line for Fit for Work can be accessed as many times as an individual requires.

There is no limit to the number of eligible patients that can be referred, but an individual can only be referred for one assessment in a 12 month period.

**Is it mandatory to refer to Fit for Work for GPs and/or employers?**

A referral should be considered for all patients who meet the eligibility criteria. However Fit for Work is not mandatory and a patient will need to provide their consent for a referral

**Is it mandatory for patients to engage with Fit for Work?**

In all cases making a referral is considered the default position if the patient consents. However Fit for Work is not mandatory as the patient will need to provide consent.

**Where can I find more information about making a referral to a Fit for Work assessment?**

England and Wales: [www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)

Scotland: [www.fitforworkscotland.scot](http://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)



## Consent and data protection

### What happens if my patient does not provide consent to an assessment or sharing the outcome of an assessment?

A referral to Fit for Work should not be made, an assessment will not be conducted and a Return to Work Plan will not be shared with you, your patient and their employer.

Consent must be explicit, informed, specific and freely given and must be given at different parts of the process:

- before you or your patient's employer make a referral to Fit for Work;
- before an assessment takes place, when your patient is first contacted by Fit for Work following referral;
- before any version of the Return to Work Plan is shared (e.g. with you or your patient's employer);
- before Fit for Work contacts you or your patient's employer or any third party if this is necessary as part of the assessment or follow up

We believe the potential benefits will mean all parties will want to engage with Fit for Work, and will actively manage sickness absence by following the advice in the Return to Work Plan.

### How are you protecting data?

DWP and Health Management Ltd are joint data controllers of personal information processed by Fit for Work in England and Wales, for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. In practice, Health Management Limited will have the primary responsibility for day to day DPA compliance in relation to personal information processed by Fit for Work in England and Wales.

DWP, Scottish Government, and Providers of Fit for Work are joint Data controllers in relation to personal data which is processed by Fit for Work in Scotland, for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. In practice the Providers will have primary responsibility for day to day DPA compliance in relation to personal information processed by Fit for Work in Scotland.

Health Management Limited and providers in Scotland have put into effect and will maintain security measures and safeguards appropriate to the nature and use of the information throughout their supply chains.

## Employer involvement

### How are employers involved?

Employers are involved in:

- making referrals to Fit for Work once employer referrals go live
- being contacted by Fit for Work as part of the assessment if the employee consents and information is required to develop the Return to Work Plan
- taking into consideration recommendations provided in a Return to Work Plan

### What if an employer does not act on recommendations?

Decisions on whether to progress interventions recommended in a Return to Work Plan following an assessment lies with you, your patient and your patient's employer. It is not mandatory to progress the interventions recommended by Fit for Work, unless this is required to meet employers obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Employers will continue to have responsibility for managing absences so it will be up to employers to decide if the interventions/ adjustments are reasonable and affordable.

However, we would encourage both parties to actively manage sickness absence and to act on the recommendations of Fit for Work as there are potential benefits to employers and employees of reducing sickness absence.

We also hope that the Government's tax exemption will encourage employers to fund any medical interventions that may be recommended by a Return to Work Plan.

Also, where employees meet the criteria for **Access to Work**, they can apply for support from the programme, such as specialist aids and equipment or support workers. For further information see GOV.UK - Access to Work.

### How does Fit for Work fit in with employer provided Occupational Health Services?

Fit for Work is intended to complement, and not replace, existing occupational health provision. Whilst Fit for Work will deliver some aspects of an occupational health service it will not deliver a fully comprehensive service. Fit for Work will fill the gap in support where that currently exists, especially for smaller employers, only one in ten of whom provide occupational health services to employees (compared to one in eight large employers)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Young, V. and Bhaumik, C. (2011) Health and well-being at work: a survey of employers. DWP Research Report No 750. (Figure 3.1)

The following differences apply:

	<b>Employer Occupational Health</b>	<b>Fit for Work</b>
Referral Routes	Employer and individual	GP and employer
Services	Employer driven and agreed	Sickness absence assessment
Point of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	At four weeks
Frequency of Contact	Employer driven and agreed	Contact when required by your case manager
Workplace Knowledge	Good	Based on employee and employer information
Duration of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	Three months compulsory discharge
Quantity of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	One referral in a 12 month period

When deemed appropriate by a case manager and the employee's consent is given, employer occupational health services will be consulted during the formation of the Return to Work Plan and when discussing the recommendations within the finalised plan.

### What will happen if your patient is found to be unable to return to work with any intervention?

You will continue to have clinical responsibility for your patient. The employer will retain responsibility for managing the absence. As is now, it will be up to the employer to decide what action should be taken if an employee fails to engage with Fit for Work, or if they do not return to work when indicated on the Return to Work Plan.

Fit for Work will not make recommendations on this or any contractual matters.

### Can fit notes still be issued?

Where a patient has chosen to share their Return to Work Plan with their employer, the Plan in most circumstances should provide the information employers need to determine fitness for work for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. Employers should refrain from requesting fit notes in those circumstances, in order to prevent unnecessary consultations in GP practices.

A patient will need a fit note to cover the period between a referral being made and a Return to Work Plan being issued. A two week fit note would be sufficient to cover this period in most cases but there may be cases where a fit note is required for a longer period.

**Once a Return to Work Plan has been issued this can be used in place of a fit note. You are not obliged to issue a fit note in these circumstances.**

However where a patient does not consent to their Return to Work Plan being shared with their employer, or their employer does not accept a Return to Work Plan as sufficient evidence of a person's incapacity to work, it may be necessary for you to provide the patient with a fit note. You should use your professional judgement to decide whether a fit note is required.

### How does Fit for Work affect Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?

A Return to Work Plan can be accepted by employers as medical evidence of whether an employee is fit for work in place of a fit note for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. An employee should not need a fit note in addition to a Return to Work Plan where they have chosen to share their Return to Work Plan with their employer, although this may not happen in every case.

Fit for Work is not mandatory and a Return to Work Plan may not be prepared in every case and therefore a fit note can still be issued if it is required in the GPs clinical judgement.

## Return to Work Plans

### What is a Return to Work Plan?

This is a plan devised by an occupational health professional in agreement with your patient following a Fit for Work assessment. The plan will include steps and/or actions that can be taken by you, your patient or their employer to help support them to return to work as quickly as possible.

A Return to Work Plan is also evidence of fitness for work which can be supplied to the patient's employer in place of a fit note.

### Can Return to Work Plans be used instead of fit notes for benefit purposes?

Return to Work Plans can be accepted in place of a fit note for benefit purposes. The length of time the Return to Work Plan will cover will be stated on the Return to Work Plan. Where a patient is not fit for work within the estimated timescales their case manager from Fit for Work will consider whether a further assessment is required. They will also consider whether the Return to Work Plan needs to be revised and cover a longer period of absence.

Where a patient is discharged from Fit for Work they may request a fit note. In this case GPs should consider whether a fit note is appropriate in line with fit note guidance.

### What happens if the Return to Work Plan does not provide evidence for sickness absence?

The Return to Work Plan will indicate if your patient is not fit for work or may be fit for work subject to the employer being able to meet recommendations. In some cases Fit for Work may identify a patient fit for work with no requirement for further absence. If there is no indication of further periods of absence, your patient has been judged to be fit for work by the service.

In the absence of a fit note, employers may accept other medical evidence relating to fitness for work, as may be sufficient in the circumstances of a particular case. A fit note can still be requested or provided.

Where employers accept a Return to Work Plan as sufficient evidence, they should refrain from requesting fit notes in order to prevent unnecessary consultations with GPs.

### What if your patient does not agree with the Return to Work Plan?

Your patients can withdraw consent at any point during the process. They can request for specific parts of the Return to Work Plan to be removed prior to it being shared with you or their employer.

### Is it mandatory to follow recommendations in a Return to Work Plan?

It is not mandatory to progress the interventions recommended by Fit for Work. Decisions for progressing interventions rest with the employer, employee and GP depending on the nature of the recommendation. However, we would encourage all parties to act on the recommendations of Fit for Work.

### Should GPs and occupational health professionals take into consideration support received through existing occupational health services?

Where a GP's consultation time with a patient permits you may wish to explore whether your patient is receiving employer occupational health services which are sufficient to support them in a return to work.

Fit for Work assessments will take into consideration any existing support being received through employer occupational health as part of the assessment. If your patient provides consent (see Consent and Data Protection FAQ above) Fit for Work may contact your patient's employer and / or employer occupational health where appropriate to support the assessment and / or Return to Work Plan.

## GPs involvement

### What happens if my patient still asks for a fit note?

Where a patient has chosen to share their Return to Work Plan with their employer, the Plan in most circumstances should provide the information employers need to determine fitness for work for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. Employers should refrain from requesting fit notes in those circumstances, in order to prevent unnecessary consultations in GP practices.

A patient will need a fit note to cover the period between a referral being made and a Return to Work Plan being issued. A two week fit note would be sufficient to cover this period in most cases but there may be cases where a fit note is required for a longer period.

**Once a Return to Work Plan has been issued this can be used in place of a fit note. You are not obliged to issue a fit note in these circumstances.**

However where a patient does not consent to their Return to Work Plan being shared with their employer, or their employer does not accept a Return to Work Plan as sufficient evidence of a person's incapacity to work, it may be necessary for you to provide the patient with a fit note. You should use your professional judgement to decide whether a fit note is required.

### Can GPs refer older patients who may be nearing State Pension age to the assessment service?

Yes, where the patient meets the Fit for Work criteria they may be referred regardless of age.

### Do you need to contact your patient's employer when making a referral?

No. It may be helpful to ask a patient if they are receiving occupational health support through their employer or whether their employer has referred them to a Fit for Work assessment when considering a referral. If Fit for Work receives duplicate referrals, the cases will be combined.

### Will I be able to contact Fit for Work and speak to the assessing health professional of my patient?

Yes, if your patient has provided consent (see Consent and Data Protection FAQ above). Case manager contact details will be provided on the Return to Work Plan. Alternatively you can use the phone numbers in this guide.

### What if my patient is not eligible or suitable for a Fit for Work assessment but needs health and work advice and support?

Your patient can be signposted to the advice service for Fit for Work.

## Further Information

### How will Fit for Work deal with dispute issues at work?

Disputes at work may be considered as a complex case. This will be dealt with on an individual basis taking all circumstances into account. Support will be provided through progressing the difficulty together with appropriate signposting to appropriate agencies e.g. mediation.

### How does Fit for Work collect feedback?

Short contact will be made with patients, employers and GPs to provide feedback about the service; this follow up takes place following discharge of a patient from Fit for Work. This will take the form of a questionnaire conducted via email or telephone. This will help support continuous improvement and evaluation of the assessment service.

### How do I provide feedback or make a complaint?

You can make a complaint by calling:

<b>England and Wales:</b>	0800 032 6235 Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
<b>Welsh Language Line:</b>	0800 032 6233 Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
<b>Scotland:</b>	0800 019 2211 Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

### What are the opening hours for Fit for Work?

<b>England and Wales:</b>	Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
<b>Welsh Language Line:</b>	Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm
<b>Scotland:</b>	Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm

What other sources of help are available for patients with health conditions to return to or look for work?

**Impartial Employment Advice**

Acas: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Or 0300 123 1100

**Careers Advice**

England: [www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/Pages/default.aspx)

Scotland: [www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk](http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk)

Wales: [www.careerswales.com](http://www.careerswales.com)

**Access to Work**

[www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview)

**Universal Jobmatch**

[www.gov.uk/jobsearch](http://www.gov.uk/jobsearch)

Where can I find more information about managing sickness absence?

Information about managing sickness absence is available from a number of sources including the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), paid-for occupational health services, in Scotland ‘Healthy Working Lives’, in Wales ‘Healthy Working Wales’ and more generally, at the Government website, Gov.UK which also includes advice on job search through Universal Jobmatch.

GPs can also use the Fit for Work advice line and website:

**England and Wales:**

[www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)

0800 032 6235

**Welsh Language Line:**

[www.fitforwork.org](http://www.fitforwork.org)

0800 032 6233

**Scotland:**

[www.fitforworkscotland.scot](http://www.fitforworkscotland.scot)

0800 019 2211



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions