

# Fit To Work Certificate



## Introduction

Sick leave is costing the economy as much as £100 billion a year, and losing 172 million working days. Currently, when an employee is ill they will be signed off work by their GP for a specified period of time and cannot return to work until that period of time expires. Even if an employee is feeling better and wants to return to work it is common for an employer's liability insurance to specify that employees obtain a return to work certificate from their GP prior to returning.

## The Changes – Fit Note

“Fit notes” are proposed to replace the old-style sick notes from April 2010, subject to final regulations being laid before Parliament in March. The new form will encourage GPs to consider what employees can do rather than what they can't, letting them offer simple, practical advice about basic workplace adjustments that could help individuals make an earlier return. These recommendations need not be exclusively medical, for example, GPs could recommend a temporary reduction in the employee's hours or suggest temporary modifications to the workplace or their duties.

Employers will then be able to use this information as a starting point for discussions with an employee about how an early return to work is possible. In doing so, it is hoped that more individuals can be supported to return to work more quickly, so reducing the risk of long-term absence and job loss for them and costs of sickness absence for the employer. In cases where work is found not to be appropriate for an individual, doctors will be able to clearly state that this is the case.

Trials are underway to introduce these fit notes electronically which would allow the notes to be frequently updated. The electronic system would also allow employers to identify patterns of absence.

## Recommendations

Employers should note that the GP's recommendations will not be binding. Therefore, organisations will still need to ensure that they have a robust sickness-absence management policy in place in order to adequately deal with sickness absence.

Furthermore, with around 30% of employees reported as suffering from high stress levels and 13% saying they feel depressed (according to a recent NHS report), it is important that organisations develop ways to encourage employees and ensure that they feel valued.

## Can We Help?

If you would like further advice on any of the above or you have other employment issues you would like to discuss, please do call us. Simply telephone us on 01708 758958 or visit us at [www.hrinsight.co.uk](http://www.hrinsight.co.uk). We look forward to hearing from you!

### HR Insight Ltd.

Orbital House 20  
Eastern Road  
Romford  
Essex RM1 3PJ

T 01708 758958

[www.hrinsight.co.uk](http://www.hrinsight.co.uk)

### General enquiries:

[enquiries@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@hrinsight.co.uk)

### Legal Department:

[legal@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:legal@hrinsight.co.uk)

### Heather Matheson:

[HMatheson@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:HMatheson@hrinsight.co.uk)