

USING THE FIT NOTE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

For physiotherapists and other healthcare
professionals



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WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?

Aim and scope

In July 2022, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) implemented legislative changes, enabling a wider range of healthcare professionals to certify Med 3 Fit notes. The healthcare professionals who can now certify these Fit notes in addition to doctors, are nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists, and **physiotherapists**.⁽¹⁾

This guidance has been developed primarily for physiotherapists working in NHS primary care who have access to the Fit note. However, it will also be relevant for physiotherapists working in other settings that can use other reports, such as the Allied Health Professional (AHP) Health and Work Report, to advise on fitness for work. This guidance will also be useful for other healthcare professionals using the Fit note and advising on fitness for work.

This document aims to provide best practice advice and examples on how to complete the Med 3 Fit note and AHP Health and Work Report.

Is this guidance for you?

In order to successfully complete a Fit note, you must ask yourself if you are the best person to complete the Fit note in any given situation. This may depend on how much training or guidance you have received, the context of where you work and your own personal scope of practice.

However, if you are delivering healthcare to service users of a working age, then you might provide advice on fitness for work. Therefore, this guidance document will be useful to guide you through these conversations.

To determine if this guidance is relevant to you, please consider:

- Are you having effective conversations with the service user about their work?
- Are you identifying and analysing the tasks and duties undertaken by individual service users?
- How far do you explore someone's work ability and confidence, and job requirements when adopting the biopsychosocial model of health?
- Do you understand work-related obstacles to recovery and how best to support the service user to overcome these obstacles?
- Do you consider work tasks when undertaking a thorough objective assessment?
- If completing fit note documentation, do you define time scales, i.e. when does the time period end for the advice you have provided?
- If completing fit note documentation, do you consider if any specialist occupational health support is required?

This document will discuss these key considerations and sign post you to further training options and resources.

WHY IS FITNESS FOR WORK ADVICE IMPORTANT?

Background

In 2023, 2.55 million people in the UK were absent from work due to sickness or disability issues⁽²⁾ and a further 3.7 million working-age people were limited in the type or amount of work they were able to undertake because of health problems.⁽³⁾ This is costing UK society £150 billion a year (7% of its Gross Domestic Product)⁽⁴⁾ plus additional government costs, of around £70 billion or £1,000 per person.⁽⁵⁾

The longer an individual is absent from work, the greater the chance of them never returning to work.⁽⁶⁾ See table 1 for statistics estimating the percentage chance that an individual has for returning to work, if they are absent from work for up to 2 years.

Table 1: Percentage chance of returning to work based on length of absence

| Time Absent from Work | % Chance of Return to Work |
|------------------------------|---|
| 4 weeks | 80% Black and Frost (2009) ⁽⁷⁾ 94% DWP/DHSC (2019) ⁽⁸⁾ |
| 6 months | 20% Black and Frost (2009) ⁽⁷⁾ 80% DWP/DHSC (2019) ⁽⁸⁾ |
| 1 year | 56% DWP/DHSC (2019) ⁽⁸⁾ |
| 2 year | More likely to retire or die (NICE (2009) ⁽⁹⁾) |

Early intervention to help support service users to remain in work, in some capacity, is of utmost importance⁽¹⁰⁾ and the Fit note is an excellent tool to communicate fitness to work advice and other recommendations. It is also a good way to have practical and supportive conversations to enable a return to work.⁽¹¹⁾

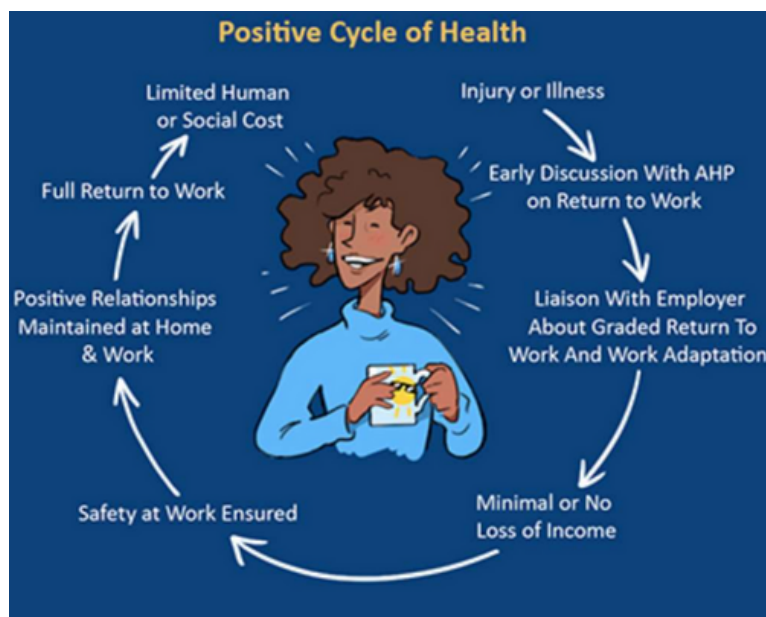
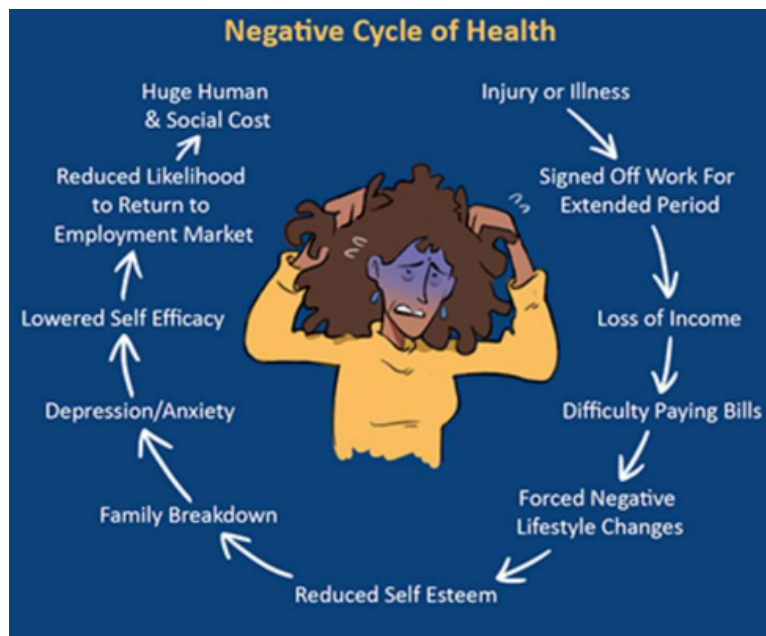
You can support your service users to remain in work and avoid prolonged sickness absence.

GOOD WORK IS GOOD FOR HEALTH

Consider 'Work' as a Health Outcome

Work, especially good work, is generally good for health with employed individuals having higher life satisfaction and happiness scores and lower levels of anxiety.⁽¹²⁾

Take a look at the infographics below and consider your role in influencing either a positive or negative cycle of health with your service users.



(13)

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Fit or Not Fit for Work?

95% of all Med 3 Fit notes state the service user is not fit to work! ⁽¹⁴⁾

These statistics have not improved since the legislation changes in July 2022⁽¹⁵⁾ and show an alarmingly high level of 'sickness' certification by healthcare professionals, with the Fit note being used as a tool to certify absence.

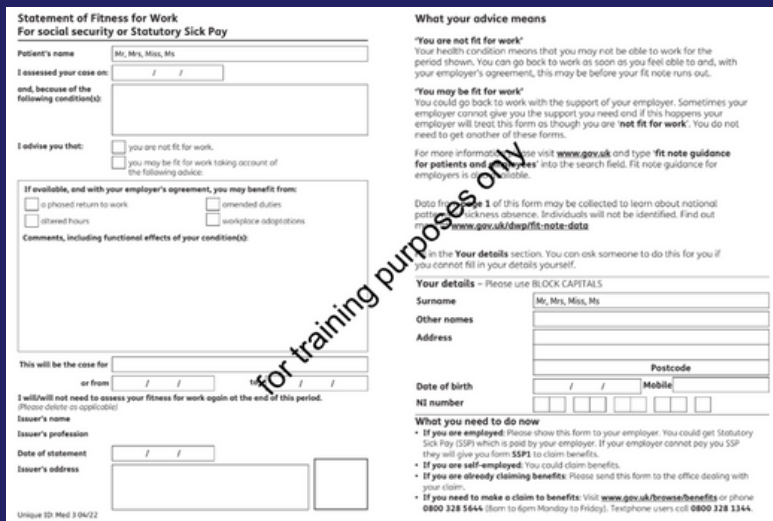
We need the Fit note to be used as a tool to support early return to work, or to help people to remain in work whilst managing their health condition.

Can you help change these statistics?

TYPES OF FIT NOTE

The Med 3 Fit note versus the AHP Health and Work Report versus - what's the difference?

Med 3 Fit note



Statement of Fitness for Work
For social security or Statutory Sick Pay

Patient's name:

I assessed your case on: / /

and, because of the following condition(s):

I advise you that: you are not fit for work, you may be fit for work taking account of the following advice:

If available, and with your employer's agreement, you may benefit from:
 phased return to work amended duties
 altered hours workplace adaptations

Comments, including functional effects of your condition(s):

This will be the case for or from / / to / /

I will/will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period. (Please delete as applicable)

Issuer's name:

Date of statement: / /

Issuer's address:

Unique ID Med 3 04/22

What your advice means

"You are not fit for work"
Your health condition means that you may not be able to work for the period shown. You can go back to work as soon as you feel able to and, with your employer's agreement, this may be before your fit note runs out.

"You may be fit for work"
You could go back to work with the support of your employer. Sometimes your employer cannot give you the support you need and if this happens your employer will treat this form as though you are **not fit for work**. You do not need to get another of these forms.

For more information please visit www.gov.uk and type 'fit note guidance for patients and employers' into the search field. Fit note guidance for employers is available.

Data from **Part 1** of this form may be collected to learn about national patterns of sickness absence. Individuals will not be identified. Find out more at www.gov.uk/dwp/fit-note-data

In the **Your details** section, you can ask someone to do this for you if you cannot fill in your details yourself.

Your details - Please use BLOCK CAPITALS

Surname:

Other names:

Address:

Postcode:

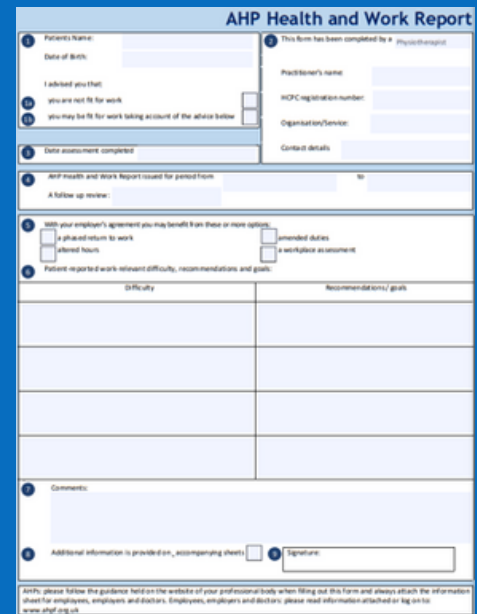
Date of birth: / / Mobile:

NI number:

What you need to do now

- If you are employed: Please show this form to your employer. You could get Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) which is paid by your employer. If your employer cannot pay you SSP they will give you form **SSP1** to claim benefits.
- If you are self-employed: You could claim benefits.
- If you are already claiming benefits: Please send this form to the office dealing with your claim.
- If you need to make a claim to benefits: Visit www.gov.uk/claim-benefits or phone 0800 328 5644 (open to 6pm Monday to Friday). Telephone users call 0800 328 1344.

AHP Health and Work Report Fit note



AHP Health and Work Report

This form has been completed by a Physiotherapist

1 Patient's Name:

Date of Birth:

I advised you that:

2 you are not fit for work

3 you may be fit for work taking account of the advice below

4 Date assessment completed:

5 AHP Health and Work Report issued for period from to

A follow up review:

6 With your employer's agreement you may benefit from these or more options:

phased return to work amended duties

altered hours workplace assessment

7 Patient reported work relevant difficulty, recommendations and goals:

| Difficulty | Recommendations/ goals |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

8 Comments:

9 Additional information is provided on accompanying sheet

10 Signature:

NOTE: please show the guidance held on the website of your professional body when filling out this form and always attach the information sheet for employees, employers and doctors. Employees, employers and doctors: please read information attached or log on to www.ahp.org.uk

- Can be completed by a doctor, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, nurse or pharmacist (working with NHS service users) who has access to electronic or paper based copies provided by the DWP
- Acceptable for statutory sick pay and universal credit purposes
- Required after 7 days of continuous absence from work
- In the first six months of a condition, the Fit note can cover a maximum of 3-months, after that it can be any clinically appropriate period of time

- Can be completed by any of the 12 Allied Health Professions
- Freely available to use as an editable pdf or printed paper version
- Acceptable for statutory sick pay purposes but not universal credit
- Recommended for use in private practice
- Allows for more detail to be included, due to more space on the form

HAVING AN EFFECTIVE WORK CONVERSATION:

Do you talk 'work' enough?

An effective work conversation must be 'person centric' and highlight the service user's job tasks and demands.⁽¹⁶⁾ Often the person themselves will have a good understanding of what they can and cannot undertake at work, and may also have insight into what needs to be done in order to support them to remain at work.⁽¹⁶⁾

Try using open questions to delve below the surface and gain a true picture of events. Use of 'coaching' or motivational interviewing techniques may help.⁽¹⁷⁾ The following ICE acronym can be helpful to consider factors from the service users point of view.⁽¹⁸⁾

| | |
|---|--------------|
| I | Ideas |
| C | Concerns |
| E | Expectations |

Here are some phrases you may wish to use:

'Do you have any concerns or worries about your ability to undertake your work?'

'Tell me about your work tasks so we can make a plan together'

'What duties do you feel you can do?'

'What support do you feel is required to help to you get back to work?'

Concentrate on what they 'can' do

HOW TO COMPLETE THE FIT NOTE

What is best practice?

Here are some top tips on completing either the Med 3 Fit note or the AHP Health and Work Report.

- Assess the service user using the biopsychosocial model of health⁽¹⁶⁾
- Avoid the use of jargon or medical terms⁽¹⁹⁾
- Use clinical reasoning skills and objective measures to support your decision making.⁽²⁰⁾
- Ensure all recommendations are clear, specific and practical to undertake⁽¹⁹⁾
- Avoid using the term 'light duties' as it is unclear to the employer what light duties means⁽¹⁹⁾
- Avoid dictating the provision of expensive equipment. It is better to recommend that a specialist workplace assessment is undertaken⁽²¹⁾
- Always add a timeframe to your recommendations⁽¹⁹⁾
- Discuss the content of the fit note with the service user and ensure they understand what is included in the report⁽¹⁹⁾
- Remind service users that a Fit note is advisory. They can choose to return to work sooner if they have recovered quicker than anticipated. Also, they do not require a new Fit note to be signed back to work⁽¹⁹⁾
- Discuss work when seeing a service user for follow up appointments⁽¹⁹⁾
- Always give the Fit note (paper or electronic copy) to the service user to pass onto their employer⁽¹⁹⁾

ACCESSING THE FIT NOTE

Access will vary depending on where you work

The AHP Health and Work Report can be downloaded from the following websites and hyperlinks:

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) - open access to all [HERE](#)

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) - open access to all [HERE](#)

Allied Health Professions Federation (AHPF) - open access to all [HERE](#)

The eMED 3 Fit note can be accessed via EMIS or SystmOne in NHS primary care settings. Information guidance can be found in the Resource library of ACPOHE [Work and Health Hub](#), under the Fit note resources for FCPs, GPs and patients tab. For non ACPOHE members access is via FREE guest access.

Alternatively visit [Emis Now](#).

Click here for access to [eMED3 Fit note in secondary care](#).

Paper copies can be ordered via the DWP website.

Click here to order [pre-printed Med3 Fit notes](#) (for NHS service users only).



MANAGING SERVICE USER EXPECTATIONS

Use our resources to help you!

Recovery expectation is an important predictor of recovery and return to work.⁽²²⁾ The return to work conversation will be easier and more productive if the service user is expecting or requesting for the fit note to be used to support their return to work, rather than their absence. These service-user facing resources should help to manage service user expectations:-facing resources should help to manage service user expectations:



Advice for Patients **ACPOHE**
PHYSIOSFORWORKANDHEALTH

WHAT IS A FIT NOTE & WHERE CAN YOU GET ONE?

FIT NOTES ARE ISSUED BY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TO PROVIDE YOUR EMPLOYER WITH RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR HEALTH AT WORK

THIS ALLOWS YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYER TO CONSIDER WAYS TO HELP YOU TO STAY IN, OR RETURN TO WORK

FIT NOTES ARE ALSO USED FOR CLAIMING STATUTORY SICK PAY AND ILL HEALTH BENEFITS

FIT NOTES CAN BE ISSUED AT YOUR GP SURGERY AND OTHER NHS SETTINGS BY:

- PHYSIOTHERAPISTS
- NURSES
- PHARMACISTS
- DOCTORS
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

SEEK SUPPORT FROM YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL AS SOON AS YOUR HEALTH IMPACTS YOUR ABILITY TO WORK

CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY



Advice for Patients **ACPOHE**
PHYSIOSFORWORKANDHEALTH

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR FIT NOTE

SEEK SUPPORT FROM YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL AS SOON AS YOUR HEALTH IMPACTS YOUR ABILITY TO WORK

REMEMBER THAT FIT NOTES CAN BE ISSUED BY NHS:

- PHYSIOTHERAPISTS
- NURSES
- PHARMACISTS
- DOCTORS
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

ASK FOR ADVICE ON WHAT YOU CAN DO AT WORK

SHARE YOUR FIT NOTE AND DISCUSS THE ADVICE GIVEN, WITH YOUR EMPLOYER

RETURN TO WORK IN SOME CAPACITY AS SOON AS YOU ARE ABLE. USING THE FIT NOTE TO GUIDE A PRACTICAL RETURN TO WORK PLAN

CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

Posters can be downloaded from ACPOHE [Work and Health Hub](#)

MANAGING SERVICE USER EXPECTATIONS

Video for service users - What is a Fit note?

The video below will help explain the Fit note to service users. It explains who can provide a Fit note and when a Fit note is required. It includes positive messages on the benefits of work on health.

Statement of Fitness for Work
For social security or Statutory Sick Pay

Patient's name: Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms

I assessed your case on: 1 /

and, because of the following condition(s): 2

I advise you that:

3 you are not fit for work

4 you may be fit for work taking account of the following advice:

5

If available, and with your employer's agreement, you may benefit from:

a phased return to work

altered hours

Where can you go for a fit note? Who can you see?

Find out in the next 60 seconds...

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Video can be downloaded from [ACPOHE Work and Health Hub](#)

COLLABORATIVE WORKING IN PRIMARY CARE

GPs and other healthcare professionals, working collaboratively, with agreed pathways.

In general, GPs have less time to complete Fit notes than other health professionals⁽²³⁾. However, historically in Primary Care, they have been the sole practitioner responsible for completion of the Fit note⁽²³⁾. Now that multiple healthcare professionals are able to complete the Fit note it is important that roles are clarified and that communication is effective⁽²⁴⁾. As well as creating a more efficient service, this will also send a consistent message to the service user and help to manage expectations. This webinar provides an example of collaborative working.

The video below explains the role of the First Contact Physiotherapy Practitioners in supporting service users back to work.



The image shows a video player interface. The background is a blurred image of a 'Fit note' form. The form contains the following text: 'Statement of Fitness for Work', 'For social security or Statutory Sick Pay', 'Patient's name', 'I assessed your case', 'Mr, Mrs, Miss', 'phased return to work', 'altered hours', 'your employer's agreement, you may benefit', 'work taking account', and 'following advice:'. In the top left corner, there is a logo for 'ACPOHE PHYSIOSFORWORKANDHEALTH'. In the top right corner, there is a logo for 'CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY'. The main title of the video is 'The Role of First Contact Physiotherapy Practitioners in supporting patients back to work', with 'First Contact Physiotherapy' in yellow and the rest in white. Below the title, it says '2 minute explanatory video'. There is a play button icon in the center of the title. At the bottom, there is a progress bar with a white circle indicating the current position.

Video can be downloaded from ACPOHE [Work and Health Hub](#)

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE FIT NOTE

This leaflet is a quick reminder of best practice for health care practitioners when completing the fit note.

Advice for GPs and FCPs

ACPOHE
PHYSIOSFORWORKANDHEALTH

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE FIT NOTE

ASK YOUR PATIENT ABOUT ABOUT THEIR WORK TASKS IN DETAIL

RELATE JOB DEMANDS TO CLINICAL PRESENTATION

CONSIDER TOGETHER WHAT THEY 'CAN DO' AT WORK

MAKE CLEAR AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMUNICATE TO THEIR EMPLOYER VIA THE FITNOTE

JUSTIFY YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS WHEREVER POSSIBLE, SO ALL PARTIES UNDERSTAND WHY RECOMMENDATIONS ARE BEING MADE

REQUEST SPECIALIST WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT WHEN REQUIRED

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Poster can be downloaded from ACPOHE [Work and Health Hub](#)

WHERE TO ACCESS TRAINING ON THE FIT NOTE?

Free training programmes and documents include:

- eLearning for Healthcare - The Fit note [CLICK HERE](#)
- AHP Health and Work Training (CSP members only) [CLICK HERE](#)
- AHP Health and Work Report: Guidance for AHP practitioners on the use and completion of the Report [CLICK HERE](#)
- ACPOHE Work and Health Hub (FREE Guest Access) [CLICK HERE](#)
- DWP Fit note guidance for healthcare professionals [CLICK HERE](#)
- DWP Fit note guidance for healthcare professionals and their employers [CLICK HERE](#)



WHERE TO ACCESS TRAINING ON THE FIT NOTE?

Quick Fire Training Video on the importance of supporting patients to remain in, or return to work (8 mins to undertake)



Video can be downloaded from [ACPOHE Work and Health Hub](#)

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

Supporting service users to remain in, or return to work, is an important aspect of our role as healthcare practitioners

You may be the best person to complete the Fit note

Ticking the box 'maybe fit for work,' and providing advice to the employer on measures to support the employee, may be the most beneficial intervention you undertake



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