

## Fit note FAQs

July 2022

### What do you mean by the fit note?

We mean the GP fit note or Med3 which could previously only be issued by doctors. More than ten million are signed every year across the UK, mostly for sickness absence from work or welfare benefits.

### Does the change include all occupational therapists across the whole UK?

It covers all qualified occupational therapists at point of registration with the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council) in Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland.

### What are the benefits of occupational therapists issuing fit notes?

- You can relieve pressure on GPs so they can focus on medical needs.
- You are experts at giving work and health advice.
- You can ensure people get more tailored advice faster.
- You can use this to build innovative pathways to vocational support.
- Your occupational therapy rehabilitation offers all-round solutions by targeting the worker and their health and/or disability, their job tasks, and the work environment.

### Where do I find the fit note training module?

The [fit note training module](#) aims to empower and support you to issue fit notes. The course is hosted on [e-Learning for Health](#) and should take two to four hours to complete. It uses a case study approach and includes:

- Session one – an enabling approach to health and work conversations.
- Session two – key legislation and guidance relevant to the fit note.
- Session three – making recommendations on the fit note.
- Session four – practical application of the fit note.

### Where can I find the guidance document?

The [UK Government's guidance](#) covers job roles, scope of practice and how employers can provide in house development opportunities for you if needed. Check out the guidance [Who can issue fit notes: guidance for healthcare professionals and their employers](#).

### What does this mean for the AHP Health and Work Report?

It does not change anything about this tool which can still be used as before, for example, for statutory sick pay. The AHP Health and Work Report and the fit note are similar in content. If you are familiar with it, the transition to the fit note will be easier. Find out more [on our website](#).

### Who else will be able to issue fit notes?

Four new groups are involved: occupational therapists, nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists. Doctors will continue to sign fit notes.

### **How do I work with my employer to start using the fit note?**

New guidance from the UK Government has been created for you and your employer to work out how to make this change in practice. As four new professions are involved, it may be easier to make the changes together. In primary care, it will be important to involve practice managers, GP and nursing leads and receptionists in the change. You can also share your skills with the primary care team to expand capacity for fit notes.

### **I'm an occupational therapy student in a GP surgery – can I use the fit note?**

No. You can use the AHP Health and Work Report but issuing fit notes can only be carried out once you have qualified as an occupational therapist and are on the HCPC register.

### **Will I be using a paper or electronic fit note?**

The fit note used to be directly signed by the GP/doctor. This meant using paper pads of fit notes or printing them from the electronic care records. However, the need for handwritten signatures was removed in April 2022.

A new fit note template using digital certification is being embedded in all GP IT systems. This means completing, certifying, and issuing fit notes can shortly all be done digitally. The paper version is being phased out and replaced by the e-Med3. [Find information from the UK Government about ordering paper versions.](#)

### **I work in a hospital – can I use the fit note?**

Yes. Currently very few fit notes are issued from acute care, but we hope that will change to offer people earlier health and work advice. Progress to embed the fit note in hospital IT systems has started but changes to primary care IT systems will happen first. To help the uptake of the e-Med3 in acute care, it will be important to check the push for digitisation of services includes the new fit note template.

### **Is there suggested text that can be added to my job description to cover this?**

The occupational therapist will contribute to the fit note process and help people remain in work by using vocational-focused interventions that address work ability, job demands and working environment. They will advise on, and develop, return to work plans using the fit note.

### **Who has the final say if the GP and occupational therapist have differing opinions?**

The guidance we give on a fit note is advisory only. Where there are differences of opinion, it is for the person's employer to choose which advice they accept or not.

### **What happens if someone is discharged from our service before the end date on the fit note – do the GPs take over?**

The end date that you put on the fit note still stands, even if the person is discharged from your service. However, if the person's clinical presentation or need changes they or their employer may seek updated advice. If they are no longer in your service, it would have to be from elsewhere.

### **Are occupational therapists working in social care expected to sign fit notes?**

The legislation change is permissive and enabling. This means not every occupational therapist has to or indeed should issue fit notes. The [UK Government's guidance](#) guides you through a process with your employer to establish if this new task is part of your current job role and if it is in your current scope of practice to be able to give health and work advice.

### **What is happening about barriers to employer's attitude?**

Employers have only ever had fit notes from GPs so may initially query fit notes from other professions such as occupational therapists. However, once reassurance is provided that the changes are legally valid, they are likely to accept them. There may be some circumstances with certain safety critical jobs, such as train drivers, where the employer will only accept advice from a doctor, usually an occupational health doctor.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has communicated these changes to employers and has provided [this updated guidance](#).

### **Are there restrictions on grade of occupational therapist who can do this?**

There are no restrictions. The legislation says that occupational therapists who are on the HCPC register can issue fit notes. However, the accompanying guidance is clear that it must be done in agreement with your employer (if you have one), and only if it is within your scope of practice. [Find information on scope of practice](#).

### **Do we need further training?**

You do not have to do further training unless you and your employer identify that you have training needs in relation to giving work and health advice. However, RCOT would recommend that occupational therapists carry out the free online training module that has been prepared for this change to maximise safety and assurance. [Find the fit note e-learning on the HEE website](#).

### **Why is it that only GP fit notes can be used for benefits rather than the new AHP Health and Work Report?**

There is not a new AHP Health and Work Report. The existing AHP Health and Work can still be used to give health and work advice and for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) if both employer and employee agree. However, it cannot be used for social security benefits. However, a fit note (or Med3) issued by an occupational therapist, can be used for both SSP and social security benefits.

### **How often would you have a conversation with the employer before completing the form?**

Discussions about health and work between a person and an occupational therapist are confidential. Information sharing or contact with an employer can only happen with the consent of that person. Currently most fit notes are completed with no prior employer contact. The fit note is shared with the person, and it is their choice if they wish to share with their employer. The employer is the receiver of the fit note, and it is not dependent on a conversation with the employer. You are not required to discuss with the employer directly.

### **What information 'overrides' other information? For example, from human resources and occupational health for sickness absence or welfare benefits.**

An employer can decide what evidence to use for sickness absence purposes. Where they have conflicting information, they can choose between this advice. Benefits processes can also choose which among conflicting advice they accept. The role of the occupational therapist is to provide your autonomous, clinical opinion.

### **In primary care this could be a large extra workload – could GPs pass on anyone who needs a fit note?**

The [UK's Government's guidance](#) gives advice about workforce planning as the legislation opens the task to four new professional groups. Issuing a fit note is part of a clinical intervention that includes an assessment followed by a shared, coproduced work and health plan. This plan may include information about self-management advice and/or workplace modifications that could enable return to work.

In that context, to add best value to the system, issuing a fit note should be part of an occupational therapy intervention, rather than for example, seeing everyone with a cough, cold or flu who needs a one-off period of sickness absence.

### **Would you fill out both the AHP Health and Work Report and the Med3?**

As the format and content of both are extremely similar, there should not be a need to fill out both.

### **How do we access the Med3?**

There is currently a roll out program in primary care of the e-Med3 which should mean that any occupational therapist working in primary care accessing the GP electronic records, will be able to access and use the tool.

However, as paper pad versions of the Med3 are still in use, there will be a crossover period when both are in circulation. If occupational therapists do not have access to the digital tool, you'll find information about ordering paper versions [on the UK government website](#).

### **What if an employer ignores the fit note?**

Because of the legal contract between an employer and employee, employers have the right to ignore fit note advice. They may sometimes provide a written explanation about why they have not accepted the advice.

### **Does this change our professional insurance?**

It does not change professional insurance. You are covered by your employer's liability (if you have an employer) to carry out agreed tasks related to the business of the organisation. RCOT insurance also covers occupational therapy practice within the guidance provided [on our website](#).

### **Can private occupational therapists' issue fit notes?**

Yes, private doctors have been doing this for many years. But you will have to issue a "form to like effect" of the fit note, as described in the fit note regulations. Your form can still be used by the employer for sick pay and for benefit purposes.

The fit note that you issue must contain all the same information on a DWP fit note. You can create a local fit note template which contains the following information:

- Title of form.
- Name of issuer and profession, contact details, signature.
- Name of patient and date assessed.
- Patients' diagnosis/condition.
- Whether the patient is currently not fit for work or may be fit for work.
- If they may be fit for work, whether they would benefit from a phased return, altered hours, amended duties, adaptations.
- If you have any further comments.
- A valid from and valid to date. Alternatively, you can indicate if it is valid for a period of weeks, months or indefinitely.
- You can add if a follow-up assessment is required and when.

- You can add how the form has been supplied e.g., letter sent by email, printed and given by hand.

#### **Where can I learn more about this area?**

- Join [RCOT Specialist Section – Work](#) who passionately believe that occupational therapists have a key role in this area.
- Watch our Annual Conference 2022 session on catch up [\*The fit note – what does it mean for you?\*](#).
- Come to the fit note monthly meetings starting in August to help you get going with the changes. [See the upcoming dates.](#)
- Do our CPD module [\*Work as a health outcome: What is YOUR role?\*](#).
- Become an [RCOT Health and Work Champion](#).
- Do the [\*Allied Health Professional \(AHP\) Health and Work Report\*](#) online training.
- Look at all the [HEE e-learning work and health modules](#).
- Look at the Royal Society of Public Health's recent [report and digital resources](#) about the role of AHPs in health and work.

If you have any questions, please contact [genevieve.smyth@rcot.co.uk](mailto:genevieve.smyth@rcot.co.uk).