

STATEMENT OF FITNESS TO WORK (PGR STUDENTS) GUIDANCE NOTES

Introduction

From 6th April 2010 statements of fitness to work ("fit notes") replaced the current system of medical certificates for all employees. As postgraduate research (PGR) student policy on sickness absence is based on staff policy, PGR student policy has been revised to reflect the change. These guidance notes explain the changes to the system and to the University's procedures for managing sickness absence for PGR students. These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with the University's Policy on Circumstances Leading to Changes to Postgraduate Research Study:

<http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/code/changestodegrees/>.

Members of staff of the University should refer to the staff-specific guidelines at

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=5672>

All periods of sickness absence after the first 7 calendar days must be covered by a statement.

Any sickness absence of 7 days or less must still be covered by the self certification form (see section 17.1 of *Policy on Circumstances Leading to Changes to Postgraduate Research Study*).

Changes to the statement

1. The statement will show whether the student is:
 - i. unfit to work [i.e. 'study'] and must stay off sick, or;
 - ii. may be fit for work [i.e. 'study'] with some support.
2. The 'fit for work' option has been removed, which means that students will no longer be able or required to obtain a note confirming they are fit to return to study after a period of sickness.

What does this mean?

3. **'Not fit for work'**. This means that the doctor's assessment of the student's condition is that they should not study for a stated time period. The note will also state whether the doctor needs to assess the student again at the end of the period.
4. If the doctor does not need to assess the student again at the end of the period, the student is expected to return to their usual research at the end of this period and no further note will be provided.
5. If the doctor needs to see the student again and during the subsequent consultation they feel the student is able to return to study without any functional limitations, no further statement will be issued and the student can return to their usual studies. Otherwise the doctor will issue a new statement.
6. **'May be fit for work'** should result in fewer students interrupting when they could possibly do some or all of their research with some support. This may help students to make an earlier return to their research, but it is not intended to get students back before they are ready.
7. 'May be fit for work' means that the doctor's assessment is that their condition does not necessarily stop them from returning to their research. The doctor will provide some comments on how their condition will affect them, and make some **suggestions** of things that may help them to return to their research. The doctor may also suggest an occupational health assessment is required. Possible support may include:

- Phased return – gradual increase in intensity of study over the period stated.
 - Amended study – reduction or removal of particular tasks during the period stated to aid recovery.
 - Workplace adaptations – for example, someone with reduced mobility may need to avoid stairs.
8. If it is not possible for the University to provide the support suggested then the statement will cover the period of absence as if it had advised 'not fit for work'. The student does not need a new statement to confirm this.

Period covered by the fit note.

9. The advice (either 'not fit' or 'may be fit') applies to the period or dates stated, which can be up to a maximum of 3 months during the first 6 months of sickness. Any period in days refers to calendar days not working days.

Procedure when a fit note is issued.

10. **On receipt of a 'not fit for work' statement** the student must contact both the relevant Graduate Office Administrator and their Supervisor immediately to relay the doctor's advice and send the statement to the graduate administrator straight away.
11. If a student with a 'not fit for work' statement feels better and wishes to return to study before the expiry of their fit note, they may only do so with the agreement of their Supervisor or PGR Director and a nominated member of staff independent from the student and his/her research project. The Supervisor/PGR Director and nominated member of staff should always seek advice from Occupational Health. The student does not need to return to their doctor for agreement.
12. **On receipt of a statement indicating 'may be fit for work'** the student must contact the relevant Graduate Office Administrator and their Supervisor immediately to relay the doctor's advice and arrange to meet their Supervisor, if necessary, as soon as possible to discuss in more detail and explore whether a return to study can be arranged.
13. Any return to study arrangements must be agreed and be clearly documented by the Supervisor or PGR Director and kept on the student's file. Any adaptations should be temporary and for a specific time period which may be less than the period indicated on the doctor's statement. Adaptations should usually reduce over the agreed period, enabling the student to build back up to normal study. The Supervisor or PGR Director must arrange to review these with the student during the agreed period.
14. The Supervisor or PGR Director may wish to contact Occupational Health and/or the Disability Support Office for advice when considering whether sufficient support can be offered to enable a return to study. It may also be necessary to carry out a workplace risk assessment.
15. If the Supervisor or PGR Director cannot provide support to enable a return to study, this must also be documented and kept on file. The Supervisor or PGR Director should arrange to review the situation with the student prior to the expiry of the statement in case the student's condition has improved or circumstances have changed to enable support to be provided.
16. If the student does not feel the support offered will enable them to return to study, the Supervisor or PGR Director may seek advice from Occupational Health who will advise as to whether they are able to return to study.

17. If adaptations are made and then, at the end of the agreed period, the student does not feel able to resume normal research, the Supervisor or PGR Director may seek advice from Occupational Health to determine appropriate action.
18. Further information on the fitness to work statements can be found on the Department for Work and Pensions website: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/healthcare-professional/news/statement-of-fitness-for-work.shtml>