



An end in sight to long-term sickness absence



employers up to £160 million a year in statutory sick pay and increase economic output by up to £900 million a year.

The lack of advice or support available is one of the main barriers faced by employers tackling sickness absence in the workplace. Under the current system, the vast majority of fit notes declare employees to be unfit for work.

The new service will enable employers of all sizes to receive bespoke, independent advice for cases of sickness absence lasting more than four weeks with the aim being to stop the thousands of people that fall out of work and onto long-term sickness benefits. It will also provide assistance where employers suspect that sickness absence is being abused, by offering an independent view of the situation.

The Department for Work and Pensions is still working on the details of the new scheme, but most people would be expected to go to the service after four weeks of sickness absence unless there is a specified reason not to, such as a serious long-term illness.

Employee sick leave can, in some cases, lead to long-term absence from work. The government is keen to redress this by way of a new scheme it is proposing to introduce in 2014 which it hopes will get people off benefits and back to work much more quickly.

It is expected that the scheme will save



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Is there a cost?

Employers will, in all likelihood, have to contribute to the cost of some treatment, such as private physiotherapy, but this will be helped by a tax break announced in the last Budget.

The scheme is intended to be seen as a positive and proactive assessment service with disciplinary action (on the grounds of capability) a last resort. It is also there to assist GPs from having to negotiate with employers about their employee's return to work; a task often considered too big for GPs on their own.

In the meantime, if you have an employee on long-term sick leave and require assistance in establishing when (or whether) they will



be 'fit' to return to work contact HRx and we will ensure that you follow the correct (and fair) process.

- Around 131 million working days are lost each year to sickness absence in Great Britain (approximately 4.5 days per worker or 1.8% of hours being lost)
- One million employees each year experience one or more spells of long-term absence (over 4 weeks)
- Employers pay £9 billion a year on sick pay and associated costs e.g. administrative and recruitment costs (£1.5 billion on Statutory Sick Pay; £6.9 billion on Occupational Sick Pay and £0.5 billion on associated costs)
- Each year, £15 billion is lost in economic output from sickness absence