



New Health and Work Service must provide access to trained healthcare professionals to be effective

The Government's new Health and Work Service must provide a gateway to a quality assured specialist occupational health advice to be effective, warn the two leading UK Work and Health organisations. The specification of the new service is due to be announced in January by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Great Britain loses 130 million days due to sickness absence per year, with a significant cost to employers, individuals and the UK's economy. Research shows that after only six weeks' sickness absence, almost one in five people will eventually leave paid employment. The new Health and Work Service announced in the Government's response to the independent review into sickness absence aims to address this. It will be available to everyone after four weeks of absence.

The Society of Occupational Medicine and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine have today issued a joint statement outlining the quality standards that they would expect to see incorporated in the specification for the new contracts. They claim that in order to operate effectively the new service must be run by appropriately trained and qualified professionals and adhere to high standards of practice. Those directly involved in the health assessment process should be working for a SEQOHS accredited provider, have specialist occupational health training and should be able to refer cases to senior occupational health professionals and specialists.

They are particularly concerned that the telephone and web based advice is quality assured and advisors are able to refer to appropriately qualified professionals in more complex cases.

A copy of the full statement is available [here](#).

Dr Richard Heron, spokesperson for the Faculty and Society of Occupational Medicine said "This new service is a great opportunity for the UK to address the health needs of many of the UK's workers. For most people, work is a key factor in their self-worth, personal identity and family life - yet too many people are not able to access the specialist help they need to get back to work quickly enough when they become sick. For the new service to be effective, it must provide access to quality assured specialist occupational health advice."