



741,210 fit notes issued by doctors due to stress last year – up 8%

Press release - 11 February 2020

741,210 'fit notes', which state that an individual is not fit to work, were issued by doctors due to stress-related disorders last year, up 8% from 686,670 in 2017/18, says GQ|Littler, the specialist employment law firm.

The total number of fit notes issued by doctors increased just 4% over the same period to 9.7 million, up from 9.3 million.

GQ|Littler says finding ways to effectively deal with work-related stress has become increasingly important for employers. This is particularly true in industries such as financial services and professional services where work induced stress-related disorders appear to be on the rise.

A recent study found that poor mental health amongst employees costs UK employers £42bn-£45bn each year – this includes absentee costs and lost turnover. The average cost per employee in financial services and insurance is the highest of all sectors at £3,353*.

GQ|Littler adds that if employers fail to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate individuals returning to work after suffering from stress, or other related disorders, then they may be exposed to Employment Tribunal claims if the employee can satisfy the legal test under disability discrimination legislation of being disabled.

In a recent Employment Tribunal case, a judge ruled that a trader faced discrimination after he started suffering from work-induced depression and his employer removed his job responsibilities without consultation. The individual had been given medical leave.

Sophie Vanhegan, partner at GQ|Littler, says: "Mental health in the workplace is having something of a #MeToo moment. It is important that employers keep up with that change."



“Employers need to have adequate policies and practices in place for supporting employees returning to work after a period of leave due to stress.”

“If someone returning from a stress-related absence has been stripped of their previous responsibilities, or is otherwise treated less favourably than before, then they may have grounds for a disability discrimination claim.”

“Failing to make reasonable adjustments for those returning from stress-related absences could also leave employers exposed to claims. For example, it may be reasonable for an employer to allow a phased return to work or offer them greater support with their workload.”

The number of fit notes where doctors have advised that an individual is ‘maybe fit to work’ depending on changes being made to workplace conditions also increased last year; to 668,720, up from 629,440 in 2017/18. This figure includes:

- 89,890 notes which advised that workspaces be adapted
- 200,100 notes which advised that working hours be altered in some way
- 203,440 notes which advised that the reintroduction to the workplace be done in phases

Sophie Vanhegan adds: “Employers in some sectors are already setting the example and being very proactive in looking to address mental health issues in the workplace.”

“Several firms in the City have created mental health networks where workers can air any issues as well as training for managers so that they can more easily spot when junior colleagues are struggling. Mental health awareness and resilience training is also becoming increasingly popular to help remove the stigma for staff in discussing mental health issues at work. There is always more that can be done though.”

*Deloitte, 2020

About GQ|Littler

GQ|Littler is the London office of the largest global employment law firm for employers. Based in the City of London, the firm is part of Littler, the world’s largest employment law firm with over 1,500 lawyers in 80 offices worldwide, offering a single source solution to international businesses. Offering risk-based contentious and non-contentious advice, the firm’s legal expertise includes employment, immigration, employee tax and incentives. Its client base spans a wide range of sectors including financial services, technology, healthcare, professional services and luxury goods. GQ|Littler is recognised as a leader in its field by both Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners, which describes the firm as “a premier outfit”.

For expert insight on the outlook of European employers, please see Littler’s annual Executive Employer Survey Europe 2019 which can be found [here](#).

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