



Teachers Managing Absence (F8) Toolkit
TMA (F8) 08:
Occupational Health Service and Referral
Process



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Introduction: Occupational Health Service & Referral Process

This toolkit provides Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers with information on the Occupational Health Service, its purpose and why and when to refer Teachers/Associated Professionals. The toolkit also provides information on how to make a referral, what information to provide, and information on Teacher/Associated Professional's rights in regard to consent and data protection.

Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers should ensure that they read this toolkit before making a referral to Occupational Health to ensure that they get the best out of the referral process.

Section 1: What is Occupational Health?

Occupational health (OH) is a specialist branch of medicine focusing on the health of employees in the workplace. OH, professionals aim to find out what impact work has on employee's health and make sure that they are fit to undertake the role they are employed to do physically and mentally.

OH, can also provide advice and recommendations on what adjustments can be made to enable employees to undertake their role effectively and wherever possible, focus on adapting the work to suit the health needs of the employee. OH, specialists can also support organisations through advising on work-related illnesses and accidents, carrying out assessments and monitoring the health of employees.

Please note that OH are not responsible for managing an absence and it is for the Head Teacher / Depute Head Teacher to determine what adjustments can be made to support a Teacher / Associated Professional at work and to ultimately take the appropriate action to address unsustainable levels of absence.

As well as aligning with the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8) the Council's occupational health service is also designed to meet the wider health and wellbeing objectives of the council, now and in the future.

Section 2: Why make Occupational Health Referrals?

The primary purpose of making referrals to occupational health is to provide Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers with up to date competent professional occupational related advice and, occasionally, specialist information to help them support, maintain and protect Teachers/Associated Professional's with health issues in the workplace and to enable them to effectively manage the overall attendance of Teachers/Associated Professionals in line with the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8).

The referral process is most effective when there is a focus on early intervention, which is proven to support an early return-to-work strategy. It also provides Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers and Teachers/Associated Professionals with recommendations of how to sustain their attendance and the support/adjustments that are required for this to happen, helping to reduce sickness absence and the associated impact of this.

The occupational health service also provides Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers with the medical information they need to make employment decisions throughout the life cycle of a Teacher /Associated Professional e.g. pre-employment health questionnaires, health surveillance, ill health decisions.

Further information on the process for Ill Health referrals can be found in the toolkit TMA 09 – Ill Health Retirement.

Section 3: When to make a referral

There are a number of circumstances that would trigger a referral to occupational health, and these are outlined below.

However normally as a minimum a Teacher/Associated Professional should be referred;

- After a continuous absence of 4 working weeks or earlier if the Head Teacher/Associated Professional deems it appropriate to do so;
- When a Teacher/Associated Professional has advised that the reason for their absence is work related stress (a referral in these circumstances should only be made either once the work related stress assessment has been completed or an attempt has been made to complete it);
- When a Teacher/Associated Professional has advised that they have an underlying condition that is impacting on their ability to carry out some or all of the duties of their role.

Other Recommended triggers

- A Teacher/Associated Professional has been, or is likely to be, off sick for longer than 4 weeks or where there is no foreseeable return-to-work date.
- A Teacher/Associated Professional has frequent incidences of short-term absence with one or more reported illnesses.
- A Teacher/Associated Professional has had an accident at work and an accurate clinical record of their injuries is required, including RIDDOR incidents.
- A Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher believes that Teacher/Associated Professional health is being affected adversely by their work (e.g. stress, upper limb disorders or back pain).
- A Teacher/Associated Professional's performance at work may be compromised because of ill health.
- A Teacher/Associated Professional is diagnosed with a critical illness such as psychiatric ill health, cancer or heart disease.
- A Teacher/Associated Professional is thought to be suffering from alcohol, drug or substance misuse.
- A Teacher/Associated Professional has notified you that they are concerned about their own ill health, particularly if they believe their health is being affected by work.
- Advice is required on rehabilitation programmes for sick or disabled Teachers/Associated Professionals.
- You require a report regarding a Teacher/Associated Professional's fitness to attend a disciplinary or grievance hearing.

Section 4: Making the referral

Information on how to make a referral to OH and what to do if you have any portal access issues can be found by clicking here [Occupational Health – My NL](#)

The main aim of a referral is likely to be to obtain advice about a Teacher/Associated Professional's fitness for work and any workplace adjustments either temporary or permanent that would benefit them and support them in the workplace.

The information sought from the occupational health service by the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher should be to determine:

- whether there is an underlying medical condition which could affect attendance;
- whether there is any direct or indirect employment cause relating to the absence;
- the prognosis on fitness for work and the expected date of return;
- any restrictions to, or adaptations if appropriate, which would be essential in order for the Teacher/Associated Professional to carry out their job;
- the need for, and nature of, a programme of support;
- any permanent ill-health issues, if relevant.

The quality of the advice report will be directly influenced by the quality of the information that is provided in the referral form and therefore providing background information will help the clinicians understand the case more and enable them to provide Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers and Teachers/Associated Professionals with relevant advice and support.

Suggested background information

- Provide all relevant information about the Teacher/Associated Professional's current health status and history. It's important to include any known diagnosis or reasons given for the absence. Details of all medical conditions are not needed, only those that are impacting on the Teacher/Associated Professional's ability to carry out their role effectively and/or attend work.
- Provide information on the current absence time scale e.g. When did the current absence commence? Is there an estimated return to work date? Do they have a GP fit note, if so, what is the expiry date?
- If the Teacher/Associated Professional is at work with a health issue, provide information on how this is impacting them in their role. If they are unable to perform all aspects of their work, then detail this in the referral.
- Is the Teacher/Associated Professional already working on restricted duties? If so:
 - Why are the restrictions in place?
 - What are the restrictions and how long have they been in place?
 - When they were last reviewed?
- For Teachers/Associated Professionals with on-going health issues;
 - What adjustments have you made for them?
 - What reasonable adjustments are you able to accommodate?
 - Are there any adjustments that you would be unable to accommodate operationally?

It is important that Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers advise OH if there are any adjustments that could not be supported e.g. removing a teacher from all classroom duties on a permanent basis. This will prevent such recommendations being made.

- Is the Teacher/Associated Professional being performance managed?
- Is the Teacher/Associated Professional currently involved in grievance, disciplinary or legal proceedings? This is particularly important and relevant.

Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers should be careful not to give personal opinion in a referral form unless this has been fully discussed with the Teacher/Associated Professional beforehand e.g. Head Teacher notes a change in the Teacher's behaviour.

Additional Questions

The referral form allows for Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers to ask additional questions in the form of free text.

These questions should be specific to the case and kept to a minimum. The clinician will be unable to ask the Teacher/Associated Professional questions on the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher's behalf and therefore it is important that any specific questions are discussed directly with the Teacher/Associated Professional before the referral is made. Some examples of good and poor questions are noted below.

Good Questions	Poor Questions
<p>What short term adjustments could you recommend to assist Mr. X back to work?</p> <p>What is Mr. X likely recovery period and when could we expect him to resume his duties.</p> <p>Please can you review Mr. X current adjustments and restrictions to see if they are still appropriate?</p> <p>Can Mr. X work in the playground during cold weather given his respiratory condition?</p>	<p>Please ask her about...</p> <p>Please find out why....</p> <p>How will she react to others critiquing her work?</p> <p>Is salt intake impacting on his blood pressure?</p> <p>What options are available to him to improve his lifestyle?</p> <p>How will he cope with future change?</p>

Referral tips

- Make sure that you complete all the sections of the referral form as missing information such as employee date of birth will result in delays to the processing of the referral.
- Append supporting documents such as absence records, previous medical reports and job descriptions and any other relevant documents.
- Keep it factual and concise. Please avoid information overload.
- Avoid assumption and emotion.
- Ensure that the Teacher/Associated Professional is aware of what is a happening and is comfortable with the process.
- Tell us about any dates or times where the Teacher/Associated Professional is unavailable to help minimise appointment late cancellation and no show charges.

Section 5: Rights and Responsibilities of a Teacher/Associate Professional

Teachers/Associated Professionals are contractually obliged to comply with all aspects of the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8) including attendance at OH assessments and other medical assessments that the council deem necessary to support them in the workplace or manage their attendance at work.

However, before making a referral it is important that a Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher discusses with the Teacher/Associated Professional the reason for the referral, the content and the information that will be sought from occupational health. Failure to do this may result in the Teacher/Associated Professional being unwilling to consent to the assessment on the day. The Teacher/Associated Professional also has the right to obtain a copy of the referral from in accordance with Data Protection.

The Teacher/Associated Professional must be advised that they are required to attend an appointment with the occupational health physician/ advisor in line with their contractual responsibilities as detailed in Section 7.2 of the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8).

In line with the terms of the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, Access to Medical Records Act 1990 and the General Medical Council (GMC) guidance, Teachers /Associated Professionals have a right to access the information provided by the health professional. If the Teacher/Associated Professional is unwilling to sign the medical consent form for the medical assessment, they should be advised that a decision will be taken regarding employment based on the information available to the Head Teacher / Depute Head Teacher.

The GMC also require all occupational health physicians and clinical advisors to offer an option to send individuals a copy of the medical advice report prior to it being sent to the Council. The only changes which an individual is able to make to the medical report will relate to factual inaccuracy (e.g. dates of treatment).

Section 7 of the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8) has further information on Data Protection and Consent in relation to employment with the Council.

Further information on how Medigold collect, use and store individual's data click [here](#)

Section 6: The Occupational Health "advice" report

Following the occupational health assessment, the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher will receive a report giving advice on the following:

- The Teacher/Associated Professional's fitness to work
- Restrictions on employment (including recommending alternative work capability options)
- A prognosis on returning to work
- Agreed return to work plan
- Target return-to-work date
- Recommended steps to facilitate an earlier return to work (if appropriate and taking into account relevant disability legislation)
- Appropriate attendance or capability targets
- The likelihood of further absences
- Whether the condition is work- or lifestyle-related
- Eligibility for ill-health retirement (if applicable).

The advice will be based on functional terms rather than medical terms (i.e. what the person can or can't do rather than what is 'wrong' with them). Where medical detail is included, this is to assist with the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher understanding of someone's condition and is only done with the consent of the Teacher/Associated Professional.

The report will also answer any specific questions that have been asked in the referral by the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher. If a Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher does not believe that all the relevant questions have been answered they should either email occupational health directly or speak to their Employment & Policy Adviser.

The report may advise that it is likely as a result of the impact of the Teacher/Associated Professional's health condition on their day-to-day life that the disability provisions of the Equality Act 2010 will apply. In those circumstances the Council has a duty under the Act to make reasonable adjustments to

enable the Teacher/Associated Professional to not be disadvantaged in their ability to attend work. Please refer to Section 5.2 of the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8) for further information as to a Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher's responsibility in relation to the Equality Act and reasonable adjustments.

Once the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher has received this report they should review this and arrange to meet with the Teacher/Associated Professional to discuss the report in accordance with the Teachers Managing Absence Policy (F8) or other relevant policy such as the Disciplinary Framework for Teachers, if the referral was made to assess an Teacher/Associated Professional's fitness to attend a hearing.

The Teacher/Associated Professional may still be at work or has returned to work before the report has been received. In those cases a formal meeting may not be required, however the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher should still arrange to discuss the content of the report with the Teacher/Associated Professional to address any outstanding concerns and review any recommend adjustments that may need to be implemented.

Head Teachers/Depute Head Teachers should contact Employment & Policy for advice on when a formal meeting to discuss the report is required.

Please also contact Employment & Policy should you require any further information on the Councils Occupational Health Service.