

For the last 23 years I have been acting for members pursuing claims for personal injury suffered in the workplace. In my experience, your union has always agreed to provide financial support for justifiable claims on behalf of its members.

One aspect of my job which has always saddened me is the emotional and financial upset of people losing their job as a consequence of injuries in the workplace.

The most recent development to the culture surrounding disability and sickness has been the recent change to the standard form of sick note used by doctors. The new sick note has been dubbed a 'fit note'.

It provides spaces for the doctor to make recommendations in respect of somebody who he considers may be fit for work but perhaps needs some assistance from their employer.

The changes to the sick note have been greeted with some caution by the TUC. There is concern that, in an effort to reduce spending on state benefits (incapacity benefit) pressure is being brought to bear on doctors to encourage people back to work before they are fit to do so. However, in practice, I don't believe doc-

Chris Lovewell, (pictured right), a partner at Tinsdills, the union's solicitors, spoke to Conference on the recent changes to the sick note, and its implications for employees. This is an edited version of his talk.



Is the new sick note fit for purpose?

tors will do this.

On the other hand, people who find themselves unable to work through ill health or injury are at risk of becoming long-term sick, leading to unemployment. The social and

emotional evils of long-term absence from work are all well recognized.

The purpose of the change to the sick note is to ensure that, wherever possible, people who do have a chance of returning to work are given every assistance by their employer and by their doctors to achieve that end.

Change

So what is the significance of this change to trade union representatives and officials? Union reps and officials are likely to have a very significant role to play in assisting members issued with sick notes which enable them to work subject to some adaptation or change.

I can see, for instance, situations arising where a member

wants to return to work but their employer won't co-operate in providing them with reduced hours or lighter work.

The change to 'fit notes' raises many interesting questions about employers' reactions to the new system. Many of the answers to the different circumstances that may arise can be found on the TUC website.

We are all, whatever our job, facing changing and challenging times. People in their workplace are far better able to face up to these challenges if they do so collectively, with the assistance of a trade union

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Contact your Union Representative for details

Mark of respect

A minute's silence was held at the start of Conference for union colleagues who had died in the previous twelve months.

Special reference was made to Ken Arnold, a former full-time officer, and Harry Edwards, a former member of the NEC.

Hospice funds receive £500 boost from raffle

A total of £500 was raised during Congress in a raffle in aid of the Douglas Macmillan Hospice Association.

The raffle was held in memory of the late Dot Griffiths, a Herceptin campaigner who was a popular speaker at a previous conference.