

Guidance on Fitness Tests

1. The role of Occupational Health

Occupational Health is about how the working environment can affect an employee's health and equally how an employee's health can affect their ability to do their job. The emphasis is on preventing ill health at work and promoting good health.

The Occupational Health Adviser (OHA) provides a range of services to protect and promote health at work, assess and advise on fitness for work and ensure health issues are effectively managed. The role of the OHA is to focus on a working environment where physical and psychological wellbeing can be supported and sustained.

The OHA sees job applicants and employees by appointment. A referral from the manager is necessary before any individual is assessed. This includes pre-employment assessment including fitness testing.

The role of the OHA is not to provide primary care, minor injury or accident and emergency services.

2. The role of fitness tests

Our health monitoring programmes are designed to assist the University meet its statutory obligations and prevent work related ill health. Such programmes assist managers and Human Resources assess initial fitness for work, periodic assessment via fitness testing, identify appropriate adjustments and rehabilitation programmes to support staff who are suffering from ill health or returning to work following a period of absence.

Fitness testing is a way of gaining information about the health related and skill related components of an applicant's or employee's fitness to do a particular job role.

All fitness tests will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and good occupational health practice. Employers must treat all job applicants in the same way at each stage of their recruitment process.

The University will carry out all fitness tests in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Information should only be obtained where it is essential to the recruitment decision and kept in accordance with the Act. The University will record the outcome of all pre-employment checks, using Pobl Aber People or an alternative HR management system.

Fitness tests are conducted to:

- ensure that applicants/employees are physically and psychologically capable of doing the work proposed, taking into account any current or previous illness;
- ensure ongoing/periodic fitness for the role;
- identify anyone likely to be at excess risk of developing work-related diseases from hazardous agents present in the workplace;

- Ensure, as far as possible, that the applicant/employee does not represent a risk to themselves or colleagues and that they will be doing work that is suitable and safe for them;
- To identify any trends or health related issues that could impact on an individual's ability to perform the job;
- To measure fitness levels following injury or long term illness;
- To identify adjustments which may be needed on medical grounds to help perform the job or train more effectively, and to protect health;
- To undertake regular health surveillance for specific hazards.

3. Mandatory fitness tests

The University will identify any posts where a pre-employment fitness test is necessary as part of the advertised job description, and the requirement to submit to a fitness test will be made explicit in the individual's contract of employment.

4. The fitness test process

The fitness test will be carried out by the OH Adviser. The entire process will take about 20-30 minutes. Employees will be asked some simple questions, including:

- whether any of your close relatives have had any relevant health issues;
- if and how much you smoke ;
- how much alcohol you drink, if any;
- what your diet is like;
- how much physical activity you do.

Employees may also have:-

- Your weight and height measured to work out your body mass index (BMI);
- Your waist may also be measured using a tape measure;
- Your age, gender and ethnicity noted;
- Your blood pressure taken using a cuff fitted over your upper arm;
- A small prick of blood taken from your finger to check your cholesterol level and possibly also your blood sugar level.
- A physical test to assess your fitness to do your role, for example this may involve crawling to assess fitness to work in confined spaces or running to assess fitness to respond to incidents swiftly.

5. Factors which may affect fitness test results

Fitness tests are subject to a large number of internal and external variables which may affect the outcome of the test. When performing a repeat test, it is important to try to limit as many variables as possible by ensuring the conditions/circumstances are exactly the same as during the previous test. For example:-

- Time of the day;
- Environment (surface/noise/presence of other people);
- A different assessor;
- Accuracy of measurements;
- Test protocol not followed exactly as before;
- Time since last meal;

- Emotional state of the applicant/employee;
- Applicant's/employee's health (recent colds/illness);
- Medication the applicant/employee may be taking.

6. Fitness Test Results

Employees will usually be told their results during the OH appointment. Employees may also be given personalised advice on how to lower any health related risk with lifestyle changes. This could include talking about how to:-

- Improve your diet;
- Increase your physical activity;
- Lose weight;
- Stop smoking.

The line manager will receive a management report (See Section 7 below).

7. Management reports on fitness to work/employment

The university's OHA provides specialist advice to the applicant/employee and line manager. The line manager decides whether to employ the applicant, in light of advice from the occupational health adviser and other relevant information. Line managers will receive, from the HR Department, a management report for both applicants and current employees including recommendations where appropriate following the assessment. Line Managers will make a decision as to whether any workplace adjustments recommended are reasonable and can be implemented in the workplace.

8. Pre-employment assessments on fitness to work

No applicant should be refused employment on health grounds unless:-

- occupational health advice has been sought;
- the applicant has had the opportunity to discuss issues raised with the occupational health adviser;
- the line manager has given full consideration to all of the facts and has discussed their decision with their nominated HR Manager.

9. Post-employment assessments on fitness to work

Where recommendations arise in the OH management report which indicate that the employee requires adjustments to be made or where the role is no longer suitable for the employee, the line manager will arrange to meet with the employee to discuss the way forward. The HR Business Partner should also attend this meeting to ensure the appropriate procedure is followed. This can be found at <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/sickness/sickness-procedure/>

10. Free Health Assessments

It is a legal requirement to offer an employee who normally works at least 3 hours during the night period (between 11pm to 6am) a free health assessment before they become a night worker and on a regular basis while they are working nights. Employees are not however obliged to accept these free health checks.

To ensure that Aberystwyth University meets this requirement employees will be invited to complete the Night Worker Health Questionnaire annually. This form will be screened by the Occupational Health Adviser and may result in employees attending an occupational health consultation to discuss any health issues identified.