



Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
British Medical Association
Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

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Secretary: Peter Hampson

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Derisory GOS fee imposed by DHSC.

Government has today announced that, despite the clear rejection of its offer by the sector, it has decided to impose another real-terms cut to the NHS sight test fee. Therefore, from 1 April 2024, the GOS sight test fee will increase by just 39p to £23.53 in England. There will also be no increase in the domiciliary visiting fee nor in the pre-registration training grant nor (for the second year running) in the CPD grant.

At the beginning of the negotiation process, the [OFNC submitted evidence](#) to DHSC and NHS England showing that the NHS pays less than 50% of the cost of a GOS sight test. The 2024/25 OFNC bid took account of wider NHS cost pressures and proposed an affordable £2.86 increase to the NHS sight test for 2024/25.

The [NHS has ignored this evidence and](#) Ministers have instead increased the NHS sight test by just 39p (1.68%) based on the forecast 2024/25 GDP deflator.

The OFNC challenged DHSC and NHS England on this throughout February and March, at which point we [updated the sector](#) about the unacceptably low offer and asked for an urgent meeting with Health Minister Andrea Leadsom to press again for an increase of at least as much as other areas of primary care which are suffering similar pressures.

DHSC and NHS England have refused to review the evidence or treat primary eye care fairly and, since we have refused to accept the real-terms cut to fees, DHSC has now unilaterally imposed this on the profession. This represents yet another failure by the NHS in England to invest in eye care or the future of the sector despite multiple years' rhetoric about transformation. We have left both Ministers and officials in no doubt about the way the news will be received by the sector. In our bid and correspondence with officials since, we had set out data clearly showing the need for a fee increase and we have highlighted the flawed and inconsistent reasoning that underpins the small fee uplift that is being imposed on the profession. This included:

- The impact of cost and wage inflation on an already under-funded sight test.
- The history of previous under-inflationary settlements.
- The impact of fuel and transport cost increases on the domiciliary sector.
- The cost increases resulting from the changes to the education and training for optometrists; and
- The cost of additional administrative burdens on GOS providers resulting from changes to referral processes.

In their response, officials repeatedly relied upon the use of the GDP deflator to determine the NHS sight test fee. This was, as [our response to them pointed out](#), utterly illogical as it ignored the

supporting evidence. Also in previous years, when inflation was increasing rather than decreasing, Government had refused to use the GDP deflator since that would have resulted in higher fee increases; now, however, they seek to rely on it.

We also pointed to the fact that GOS was again being unfairly treated in comparison with other areas of health spend, with the proportion invested in GOS already having fallen significantly in recent years. Finally, we set out the impact of this figure on a sector already under considerable strain, including smaller community practices caring for some of the poorest in the community.

In their responses, officials have been unwilling or unable to engage with these arguments and have been determined to merely impose the new figure. While we have continued to press for a Ministerial meeting to discuss the unacceptably low offer, no meeting has been offered.

We have no doubt that contractors will rightly be very angry about such a low increase being imposed on them, combined with real term cuts to training and education given commitments in the NHS workforce plan. This will have a massive demoralising effect on the sector at a time they are being asked to take on more NHS work to help hospitals struggling with waiting lists and to meet needs. The OFNC will be writing to the sector to survey the impact of this latest real-terms cut to NHS eye care.

Paul Carroll, OFNC chair said “This derisory increase shows that talk is cheap. Despite effusive praise for the important role that primary eye care plays in meeting the nation’s vision and eye health needs, once again we find ourselves at the back of the NHS queue. It is hard to take seriously, warm statements made by Ministers, when they are not backed up by action.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. About us

The Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) is the national negotiating body for eye care in England with the Westminster Parliament, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England. It comprises the leaders of the UK representative bodies: ABDO, AOP, FODO and BMA (for OMPs) and works in partnerships with the College of Optometrists and the General Optical Council.

2. OFNC Bid

OFNC submitted a bid for a reasonable increase, that took account of the wider NHS cost pressures and that would have seen fees rise to the following values:

- NHS sight test fee £26
- £44.10 for the first and second NHS domiciliary visiting fee, £11.03 for the third and subsequent patients.
- £644 CET grant
- £4,500 training grant for pre-registration optometrists, with an agreement to discuss increasing costs providers will incur from 2025 because of changes to optometric education in England.

3. GOS Fees and Grants 2024-25

The Department of Health and Social Care imposed fees and grants from 1 April 2024 are:

- Sight test £23.53
- Domiciliary £40.80 for first and second test; £10.21 for third and subsequent tests
- CET grant £596
- Pre-registration optometrist supervision grant £4,010

4. GOS vouchers

GOS vouchers are a patient benefit and do not therefore form part of OFNC negotiations. GOS vouchers will also increase by 1.68%. The optical bodies will shortly be issuing an updated version of vouchers at a glance.