



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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Helen Miscampbell
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Department of Health and Social Care
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19 March 2019

Dear Helen

GOS Fees 2019/20

Thank you for your letter of 28 February conveying Ministers' decision to keep the NHS sight test fee in England at its current level in 2019/20, and to increase the CET allowance and the pre-registration trainers' grant by 2%. We understand the values of optical vouchers for NHS patients in England are also to be frozen again this year.

As you know, our bid to NHS England made a strong case for 3% increase in the GOS fee for mandatory services, and a 4% increase for additional services. We felt that was a reasonable proposal given the efficiencies that optical practices have provided to the NHS during three years of fee freezes, the rising cost of delivering GOS services, and the additional costs of Government policy decisions that contractors have had to absorb. We also took into account the Government's statements last year about the end of austerity and the lifting of the NHS pay cap, and the recent announcements of substantial extra funding for the NHS in England, particularly in primary care.

In that context, optical contractors will be angered as well as disappointed by the decision to freeze GOS fees for a fourth year, and the statement that this is "in light of the continuing tight economic climate facing the NHS". In the wider NHS funding context, this is not a remotely convincing explanation. Community optical practices will be central to reducing avoidable visual impairment and delivering key elements of the NHS Long Term Plan. However, this decision will undoubtedly lead optical contractors to conclude that Ministers still do not properly value the excellent work they do for NHS patients. Indeed, the freeze in voucher values means that both patients and contractors will continue to suffer from a real terms cut in funding for NHS optical care in England.

We look forward to further discussion with you and NHS England colleagues, to help the optical sector better understand the thinking behind the decision. We do of course welcome the 2% increase in CET allowance and pre-registration grants, although given the freeze on fees we fear this will do little to make contractors feel more valued. In the meantime, we have no choice but to refuse to agree to these fees for 2019/20, and regret that once again they will have to be imposed on us.

Yours sincerely
Tony Stafford
Secretary, OFNC