

OFNC

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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Chairman: Mike George Secretary: Ann Blackmore

Peter Howitt
Deputy Director
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4 April 2016

Dear Peter

GOS Fees and Grants 2016-17

Thank you for your letter of 11 March 2016 informing the OFNC of the decision to freeze the NHS sight test fee, and of an increase of 1% in associated grants. As I am sure you will understand, we cannot advise the profession to accept this offer. It is therefore important we record that this fee has been imposed upon the sector, without agreement.

We understand the need to control public expenditure, but we are concerned that the burden seems to fall unfairly on optics. As a sector we are playing – and continue to play – key roles in the NHS England *Five Year Forward View* plans to transfer care to the community to take pressure off GPs, A&E and hospitals, as well as in the Government's devolution plans. And yet once again it seems that we deliver fully against contracts and yet are penalized, whilst those who do not are rewarded.

You also suggest that the decision to freeze the fee was taken because there are not perceived to be difficulties with recruitment in the optical sector. With respect this is to look at the issue from the wrong end of the telescope. The issue is services provided, not recruitment – as sector we work closely with the universities, College of Optometrists and the ABDO College to ensure supply keeps pace with demand. By setting fees at such low levels that small and independent practices are driven out of the market, the Department and NHS England are reducing patient choice and access and the range of locations from which to deliver care out of hospital. As we have repeatedly made clear the sight test fee is not simply about pay, it is also about a fair contribution to the costs of providing the service, premises, fuel, equipment etc, all

of which are rising year on year. It is disappointing that the costs incurred by optical practices in providing NHS sight tests continue to be significantly underfunded.

I look forward to receipt of the draft payment directions for CET payments.

As you know, commenting on the Department's announcement, OFNC Chair Mike George expressed the hope that NHS England would at least be able to fund our bid to support IT connectivity with the NHS. This is crucial to the delivery of the government's ambitions in the *Five Year Forward View* and to improving pathway efficiency. We therefore also look forward to your response to Mike George's letter of 18 March with regard to our bid for support to achieve IT connectivity.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Blackmore', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ann Blackmore