

## PRESS RELEASE

3 April 2020

# Optical sector rejects fifth year of freeze in GOS fees

The Government has announced that there will be no increase in GOS fees in England for a fifth successive year. The Department of Health and Social Care described this as “a difficult decision” which reflected “the lack of available evidence about any impact on NHS sight test numbers or optical businesses” as a result of fees being frozen since 2016. CET fees and pre-registration grants will rise by 2%, as they did last year.

The OFNC has told the Government that, while the sector’s priority at present is to support patients, eye care providers and the wider NHS through the COVID-19 crisis, the decision to freeze fees is not justified on the evidence. Eye care providers deliver an essential health service and have been under just as much pressure as other parts of primary care. Consequently, the freeze will have to be imposed by the Department without OFNC agreement. The OFNC had bid for a reasonable and affordable increase of at least 2.5% in GOS fees this year in line with wider investment in NHS care.

Paul Carroll, OFNC Chair, said:

“Although everyone is rightly focusing on the COVID-19 crisis at the moment and the optical sector is working hard to protect patients and support the NHS through this difficult time, we have written back to the Department of Health and Social Care about the offhand treatment of primary eye care services. The OFNC made absolutely clear to NHS England that the ongoing freeze in GOS fees is not in patients' best long term interests, with an even greater risk that NHS eye care will be unviable for some communities.

“The Government’s fee letter does not bear any relation to discussions the OFNC has had with NHS England and our response sets out to correct the record. In the

meantime, a serious injustice has been done to the primary eye care sector and eye care patients. The trust and goodwill of a loyal workforce, who will be key to delivering the Outpatient Transformation Programme and relieving long term pressures on hospitals, has been further eroded.

“The OFNC bid for 2020/21 highlighted the growing importance of sight testing and preliminary case finding in meeting growing eye health needs, and the pressures optical practices were under whilst they fought hard to continue meeting more complex patient needs, as well as the growing cost pressures on optical practices while providers have generated efficiencies for the NHS.

“The OFNC also offered to open discussions about how the skills, facilities and capacity of the primary care optical sector can be deployed through the Primary Ophthalmic Services framework to deliver the NHS Long Term Plan and Outpatient Transformation programme, by enabling more eye care to be delivered in primary care settings under the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning SAFE system. The OFNC and NHS England have agreed to continue those discussions.

“In thanking the sector for its continued work to prepare for and handle the COVID-19 crisis, NHS England has expressed gratitude for the commitment and effort that colleagues are investing in providing care for patients as part of this unprecedented national effort. We trust that this insight will remain front of mind when we next commence fee discussions”.

#### **Notes for editors:**

1. The Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) is the community eye health equivalent of the British Medical Association (BMA) and British Dental Association (BDA) General Practice Committees and community pharmacists' Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC). It is the recognised negotiating body for fees for the professions. Its members include the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), the Association of Optometrists (AOP), the BMA, and FOD. The Chair and secretariat of the OFNC are provided on an alternating basis by the AOP and FODO.
2. Paul Carroll became Chair of the OFNC in February 2020, replacing Stuart Burdett. The current membership of the OFNC is: Paul Carroll (FODO – Chair of OFNC); Henrietta Alderman (CEO, AOP); Peter Hampson (AOP); Gordon Ilett (AOP); Tushar Majithia (AOP); Harjit Sandhu (MD, FODO); David Hewlett (FODO); Alan Tinger (FODO); Sir Anthony Garrett (CEO, ABDO); Simon Longstaff (BMA); Professor Nagasubramanian (BMA); Tom Andrews (BMA). Secretary: Tony Stafford (AOP). Observers: Mike Fegan (Chair, LOCSU); Richard Whittington (CEO, LOCSU).
3. Papers relating to the fee negotiations, including the OFNC's bid to NHS England, have been published at <https://www.aop.org.uk/advice-and-support/policy/optometric-fees-negotiating-committee>

4. For further information please contact the OFNC secretary, Tony Stafford, at [tonystafford@aop.org.uk](mailto:tonystafford@aop.org.uk).