Aids to Vision Guidance

So that ECFRS are able to clearly set out allowances and re-imbursements that its employees may be entitled to claim, this guidance document details the employers liability in relation to Aids to Vision. This guidance document was reviewed and amended on the 18th February 2008 and is subject to a bi-annual review by the director of Work Force Development with any amendment being subject to agreements reached through the Service Negotiation and Consultation Committee [SNCC] sub committee – Employee Relations Committee [ERC] and Policy Review Group [PRG].

1. Introduction

So that managers are able to understand and detail to staff the conditions under which the employer is required to re-imburse costs associated with optical claims, set out below are conditions from the Grey Book [Sixth Edition 2004] an extract from Regulation 5 of the Display Screen Equipment guidance and regulations [HSE: ISBN 0-7176-2582-6] and ECFRS own guidance for managers and staff.

This guidance applies to employees of ECFRS, full and part time, including those employed directly on temporary or fixed term contracts or those working flexibly. This guidance does not however apply to consultants, contractors or other individuals who do not hold a contract of employment with ECFRS.


Spectacles for use on the fireground

6. Fire and rescue authorities shall supply or reimburse the approved cost of spectacles for use on the fireground (see paragraphs 10-13 of Fire Service Circular 9/1996).

Employees working with display screens

7. Fire and rescue authorities have a duty to comply with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 where employees work with display screens.

It is at this point it is important to stress that the definition of a DSE user is relevant, the regulations define many roles within the guidance and although this is not an exhaustive list, the occupations detailed are based on those “who habitually use DSE for the purpose of an employers undertaking as a significant part of their normal work”. Of course the work of a Fire-fighter has no requirement for DSE.
Display Screen Equipment guidance and regulations [HSE] Regulation 5.

Employers’ liability for costs

85. The provision of eye and eyesight tests and of special corrective appliances under the DSE Regulations is at the expense of the user’s employer. This is the case even if the user works on other employers’ workstations.

87. “Normal” corrective appliances are at the user’s own expense, but users needing “special” corrective appliances will be prescribed a special pair of spectacles for display screen work. Employers’ liability for the cost of these is restricted to payment of the cost of a basic appliance, i.e. of a type and quality adequate for the users work. Where bifocal or varifocal spectacles are prescribed as special corrective appliances (see caution note paragraph 83 below) the employer is required to meet the costs associated with providing basic frame and the prescribed lenses.

88. If, however, users are permitted by their employers to choose spectacles to correct eye or vision defects for purposes which include the user’s work but go wider than that, employers need contribute only the cost attributable to the requirements of the job.

89. If users wish to choose more costly appliances (for example with designer frames, or lenses with optional treatments not necessarily for the work), the employer is not obliged to pay for these. In these circumstances employers may either provide a basic appliance as above, or may opt to contribute a portion of the total cost of a luxury appliance equal to the cost of a basic appliance.

Corrective appliances

Paragraphs 81 to 82 detail likely percentage of users and good practice surrounding differential in viewing distance where work is mixed.

83. However, caution is necessary in reaching a decision. There can be side-effects associated with the use of multi-focal prescriptions for DSE work. The smaller size of each lens section can lead to the user having to make repeated adjustments to their neck/head position, or adopting an awkward position in order to look through the appropriate part of the lens. These disadvantages could prove to be more problematic than swapping spectacles, for instance by inducing neck pain. The decision on which is the most suitable solution is best taken in discussion with the optometrist; this will require information being provided about the nature of the work and the workstation and workplace layout.
ECFRS guidance on the re-imbursement of Optical Claims.

It is important to stress that ECFRS guidance on Optical claims for both Grey and Green Book employees have been developed and reviewed in line with the guidance above.

2. Correction for Fire Fighting Duties

If correction is required to meet the standards for fire-fighting duties, the Service will provide

• Two sets each of BA inserts and safety glasses* [for FF’s below Station Officer/WMB] or;
• One set each of BA inserts and safety glasses* [for FF’s at Station Officer or above]

*Either F1100 or F1700 safety glasses may be chosen.

Aids to vision are required to:

• Ensure Fire Fighters are able to work safely when wearing breathing apparatus and safety glasses and
• Meet the requirements of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations.

All Fire Fighters may claim back the cost of a general eye test. Specialist tests including retinal imaging etc. will not be refunded. Individuals may claim for the cost of one eye test once every two years or more often if recommended by an optician.

Fire Fighters should arrange an appointment with one of the approved opticians (see AM044-Approved Opticians Directory) and have Form AM022-ATV completed in full by that optician. The approved opticians have an agreement with Ophthalmic Technologies Ltd. (OTL) who are ECFRS approved suppliers for BA inserts and safety spectacles.

Purchasing Department will send an order form to the Fire Fighter, which should be taken to the optician who will complete the prescription details. The optician will send the completed order direct to OTL who will make the BA insert lenses and prescription safety glasses. OTL will send the safety glasses to the optician for fitting. The BA inserts will be sent by OTL to the Purchasing Department. Purchasing will send BA inserts together with mask bag to the individual.

Completed forms should be sent to the relevant HR Business Partner team at SHQ together with original receipts and a completed GC93 signed by the line manager. The allowance will be paid directly through payroll.

3. Correction for General Use

If employment commenced with ECFRS before 1st November 1994, £60 may be claimed towards the total cost of glasses for general use. Prescriptions may be taken to any optician and orders placed through them.

Note: the £60 towards the total cost is reimbursable once only.
4. Correction for Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Use

All staff who are designated DSE users may claim for the cost of a general eye test. Specialist tests including retinal imaging etc. will not be refunded. Individuals may claim for the cost of one eye test once every two years or more often if recommended by an optician.

Designated DSE users who need glasses solely for working on DSE are entitled to claim up to £60 towards the cost of frames plus the total* cost of lenses. Prescriptions may be taken to any optician and orders placed through them.

Note* this relates to the total cost of a lens used only for DSE work, for vari and multi focal glasses that have a specific DSE prescription, only the DSE element of the prescription is refundable. Where opticians are unable to provide a breakdown of the costs for each part of the prescription the Service will consider the total cost of the lenses compared with the basic cost of specific DSE lenses before determining the amount payable.

Designated DSE users whose general use glasses are modified for DSE work are entitled to claim up to £60 towards the cost of frames plus the cost of the modification. Prescriptions for glasses for general use may be taken to any optician and orders for glasses placed through them. The optician should be requested to complete Form AM021-VDU, confirming the cost of the modification. Note that the £60 towards the cost of the frames is reimbursable once only.

If general use glasses do not need modifying for DSE work, only the cost of the eye test will be reimbursed.

Completed forms should be sent to HR Business Partners - Resourcing at SHQ together with original receipts and a completed GC93 signed by the line manager.

Expenses will be paid directly through payroll.

5. Time Off for Eye Tests and Prescription Fittings

Uniformed Employees should arrange appointments outside of their normal duty shifts. It is recognised that support staff will have less opportunity to take up appointments outside normal working hours. Where it is not possible to make arrangements outside normal hours, appointments should be scheduled at the beginning or end of the working day so as to minimise the disruption to work.

Employees should notify their line managers in advance of their appointments so that adequate cover arrangements may be made. Managers should consider reasonable requests and appointment times for employees to attend eye tests and use their discretion to manage time away from the workplace without loss of pay.

Forms
AM044 – Approved Opticians Directory
AM022-ATV
Prescription safety glasses
AM021-VDU
GC93